


**A Personalized Public Sphere -  
A Case Study of J-blogsphere in China**

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**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirement for the Degree of  
Master of Philosophy  
In Communication**



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**Abstract of Thesis entitled:**

A Personalized Public Sphere

A case study of j-blogosphere in China

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With the rise of a network society, the relationship between Internet and the public sphere has been heatedly discussed. Blog, a newly emerged online personal means of publication, has shown its attraction among various social groups including journalists. Is j-blog a public sphere? What are the characters of blogosphere? How is blog being used among Chinese journalists? How can a personalized virtual sphere go public? In the context of today's transitional China, this research aims to explore the unique forms and functions of the blogs and discuss the relationship between public sphere and identity construction in the virtual sphere.

Anti blog is one of the most popular j-blogs in China. Anti, an off-line journalist of New York Times, uses blog as a space to present his personal views on Chinese current political and cultural issues. On one hand, it serves as a platform for public debate on political issues, while on the other hand, it is also personalized and the posts involve distinct personal characters and political ideologies.

The main methodology applied is an embedded single case study involving both quantitative and qualitative methods. It focuses on how Chinese journalists make use of their blogs as a space of online community, network each other, build and negotiate their identities between public and private sphere, and extend their oppositional power through elaborating and discussing. I found that Anti blog is a subaltern public sphere with a certain degree of openness, equality and deliberative discussion, while at the same time it is much dominated by the blogger. It is not independent of the state power and it keeps a certain distance from the off-line media. What's more, Anti uses his blog not only to express his journalistic and political belief and provide alternative information, but also to build his own online identity on purpose. Compared with the previous online practices, blog is an efficient method to construct one's identity.

I argue that public sphere theory alone can not fully explain Chinese j-blogosphere as both an alternative public sphere and a personalized sphere for the construction and representation of personal identity. The identity politics has influenced blogosphere as a virtual public sphere as well as a space for personal identity construction. I suggest a combination between the identity construction theory of Goffman and the public sphere theory of Habermas.



## 個人化的公共領域 ——中國記者博客個案研究

### 摘要

隨著網路社會的興起，關於互聯網和公共領域的討論也日益增多。博客作為一種新興的網路個人發佈形式，受到各種社會群體包括記者群體的歡迎。記者博客是否是一個網路公共領域？博客空間的特點是什麼？它在中國記者中是如何被使用的？博客空間和其他網路空間有什麼區別？一個個人虛擬空間如何公共化？本論文旨在研究中國當前背景下博客的獨特形式和功能，並討論虛擬空間裏，公共領域和個人身份構建兩者之間的關係。

安替博客是中國最熱門的記者博客之一。安替本人是《紐約時報》駐北京的中國記者。他利用博客探討他關於中國政治和文化的個人觀點。一方面，安替博客是一個討論政治議題的平臺，另一方面，這也是一個個人化的空間。博客的文章具有突出的個人特徵和政治立場。

本研究採用包含了定質和定量研究方法的個案研究作為研究方法。重點在於中國記者如何使用利用博客在公共領域和私人領域之間，構建網上社群和網路，以及構建個人身份，並通過討論和協商擴大自己的影響力。研究發現，安替博客是一個次公共空間(subaltern public sphere)。博客享有一定程度的開放度、平等度和理性討論，但是博客空間還是在博客作者的主導之下。安替博客並不獨立於國家權力，並且和傳統媒體保持了一定的距離。另外，安替博客不僅被用來表達記者的政治立場和新聞資訊，也是安替構建自己網上身份的一條有效渠道。

單純的公共領域理論不能充分解釋中國記者博客同時作為一個討論政治議題的次公共領域和一個構建身份的個人化空間這一現象。身份政治(identity politics)對於公共領域的形成具有重要影響。本文建議將葛夫曼(Goffman)的身份構建理論和哈貝馬斯的公共領域理論結合起來，進一步探索網路空間和個人身份構建，公共空間和私人領域之間的關係。

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## Chapter 1 Prologue

With the rise of a network society, the relationship between Internet and the public sphere has been heatedly discussed. Blog, a newly emerged online personal means of publication, has shown its attraction among various social groups. Many scholars are beginning to explore whether it can provide an ideal site of communication. By analyzing one of the most influential Chinese journalism blogs, Anti Blog, I want to explore the potential as well as the limits of blog as an online public sphere and raise questions of the relationship between identity construction and the public sphere. The main methodology applied in this research is an embedded single case study involving both quantitative and qualitative methods. In the context of today's China, it aims to explore the unique forms and functions of the blogs which differentiate blogging from other online behaviors. It focuses on how the Chinese journalist make use of his blog as a space of online community, network a virtual journalism community, construct and negotiate his identities between public and private sphere, and extending his oppositional power through elaborating and discussing. I would argue that Habermasian public sphere theory alone can not fully explain blogosphere as both a personalized sphere for self empowerment and a subaltern public sphere. The identity politics in the network society influence the virtual reality in j-blogosphere and help accumulate social capitals for the bloggers. The relationship between the public and the private should be rethought and taken into consideration. The personalized character both empowered and limited the



blogger and its readers from serving as an online public sphere.

Chapter 2 is the literature review. I first traced back the development of the concept of public sphere in western world, and its spreading into China. Following this, I reviewed the literature on the study of Internet and public sphere. Mainly there are two camps of debates, those who see the potential of the Internet as an ideal place of communicative action and those who see the drawbacks of Internet as a public sphere. A brief introduction of the history of blog both in the world and in China is presented in the third part of Chapter 2. It is followed by a further review of the debate on whether blogs can be seen as a potential public sphere. The influence of blog on journalism and the journalism situation in contemporary China is the fifth and sixth part of the literature review. Finally, I briefly reviewed the literature on identity and public sphere in the last part of Chapter 2, to bring the identity construction theories into the study for later analysis.

In Chapter 3, I illustrated the research methods and the three main research questions. This is an embedded single case study, about Anti blog, one of the most popular j-blog in China. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were applied. The three main research questions are interrelated and finally lead to the question of the relationship between public sphere and personal identity construction.

Chapter 4 is the findings part. The first research question about whether Anti blog is a public sphere is divided into five small ones and is answered separately.

Each question is ended up with a summary and all three questions are summarized in a chapter conclusion.

Chapter 5 is the discussion part of the thesis. It pointed out the interaction between the public sphere and identity construction process and try to evoke future studies in this field.

## Chapter 2: Internet, J-blog, and the Public Sphere

### 2.1. The Public Sphere: from West to East

The idea of 'public' is closely tied to democratic ideals that call for citizen participation in public affairs. Tocqueville (1990) considered the participation in public affairs to be at the heart of the healthy and lively American democracy. Dewey (1927) insisted that inquiry and communication are the basis for a democratic society and highlighted the merits of group deliberation over the decisions of a single authority.

The most influential theories that contributed to our understanding of the public sphere were produced by Habermas. By public sphere, he means 'a forum in which the private people, come together to form a public, readied themselves to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion.' He traced back into the history of the development of the public sphere in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe and its decline in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Habermas, 1962/1989). He saw the public sphere as a domain of our social life in which public opinions could be formed out of rational public debate (Habermas, 1991). The communicative rationality is seen as a way of human emancipation. It involves rational-critical discourse where the 'force of better argument' alone moves discussants towards greater understanding and consensus<sup>i</sup>. He argued that in the increasing complexity and rationalization of societies over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the rise of the mass media, 'the public sphere becomes the court before which public prestige can be displayed – rather than in which critical debate is carried



on.’ (Habermas, 1989: 201). Habermas saw television bringing about the refeudalisation of the public sphere. In other words, a space for participatory communication is severely constricted.

But later on, with the considerable attention and criticism aroused by his work, Habermas himself revised his own thoughts. He recognizes the existence of alternative public sphere and their capability for challenging domination. By revising his pessimistic opinions of the public, he emphasizes the ‘pluralistic, internally much differentiated mass public’ (Habermas, 1992). He also registers his ambivalence towards new information and communication technologies as a potential source of equal and inclusive communication. (Habermas, 1998)

John Keane (1995) claimed that a theory of a unified public sphere should be abandoned, because public sphere can and do develop within various realms of civil society and state institutions, which is not adequately explained by the Habermasian and the public service modal. Public life today is ‘not as Habermas defined it in *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, but in the different sense of a developing and complex mosaic of differently sized, overlapping and interconnected public sphere’. It is important to see the public sphere not only as a separate domain but also an aspect of various social practices. (Koivisto & Valiverrronen, 1996) Media should be regarded as a multi-vocal discursive forum, where social relations and identities are continuously negotiated, reformulated and contested.

Habermas (1962) proposed four kinds of public spheres: representative



public sphere, literary public sphere, bourgeois or liberal public sphere, and mass media public sphere. Some scholars proposed multiple public spheres. They see the Habermas' public sphere not that ideal as he claimed, because, for example, it does not include females and other minority groups. The subaltern public sphere is broader than Habermas' public sphere. Such public spheres as cultural public sphere (Bolin, 2000), black public sphere (Dawson, 1995), partial public sphere (Hansen, 1993), and other feminist and leftist public sphere were proposed and studied as different from Habermas' public spheres. In Fraser's (1992) model, members first enter subaltern public sphere and then interact with other social members, through which a subaltern/counter public sphere emerged and those marginalized groups can be empowered. The drawback of these multiple public spheres is that they are not able to answer the integration of the fragmented society and loses the insight of a normative ideal of democracy as Habermas has.

Five major themes are discussed about the public sphere in Western world at the beginning of the new century: that it's too *trivialized*, *commercialized* and *fragmented*; that it relies too much on *spectacle* rather than rational argumentation; and that it has caused citizens to become too *apathetic* about important public issues. (McKee, 2005)

The discussion of public sphere and China started in overseas China studies. Some overseas scholars tried to use this theory to explain Chinese society since late Qing Dynasty. Huang (1993) proposed that other than the dichotomous opposition between state and society, a third realm exists. This third realm is 'a

space intermediate between state and society in which both participated'. Compared with Qing and the Republic, contemporary China has been more pervasive and intrusive, resulting in the state-ification of large parts of the old third realm through institutionalization. 'The actual sociopolitical change of China has really never come from any lasting assertion of society autonomy against the state, but rather from the workings out of state-society relations in the third realm'.

The concept of public sphere was introduced into Chinese academic research in late 1980s and was heatedly discussed in early 1990s. (Cheng, 2005) As a concept originated and developed in Western culture and society, some scholars doubt whether the concept can well accommodate to the study of Chinese society. With the reform and open-up policy, different interest groups emerged and huge contradictions occurred. The authority of the state is deeply in doubt. The discussion of public sphere is a response to this change and originated in an urge for democracy. However, the liberal and the neo-left intellectuals took different positions concerning the relationship between the society and the state. On the liberal side, they believe in market economy and the autonomy of the civil society in which individual people pursuits their own economic interests and are empowered by the market economy, thus develop themselves into democratic agencies against the state. They believe society should be independent of the state power. On the contrary, the neo-left intellectuals argue that market economy empowers those who benefit from both economic and



political capitals and deprives lower class citizens of their rights of political participation. They found that the Chinese civil society today is intertwined with political and economic power, and full of different power relationships. Civil society in contemporary China is not a self-sufficient 'private sphere', but a sphere of power struggles. I personally doubt the power of market in solving social problems. Just as Dirlik's (1993) has once criticized that the debate on civil society and public sphere in China has been trapped in a criticism of socialism in China, while neglect the problems in capitalistic democracy. It is true that the Chinese Internet, once belong to a third realm between state and society, has constantly been institutionalized by the state, but this doesn't mean that market power alone can be the solution for this problem. Market power alone can not create an independent public sphere in China.

## 2.2. Internet and the Public Sphere

Some scholars regard the public sphere model of Habermas as something outmoded in relation to online practices. Poster (1997) insisted that communicative rationality assumes a modernist, rational subject, which is radically decentred in online communication because subjects become detached from materially fixed, embodied context and is dispersed and multiplied continuously through digitization. These postmodernists argue that cyberspace represents a 'hyperreality' in which the rational subject is radically decentred and cyberspace undermines communicative rationality and the public sphere. Thus, the concept is seen to be useless for evaluating democratic interaction through

the Internet. McDorman (2001) also listed four objections to the Internet, which prohibited it from being a public sphere: commercialization, elite, reflective interaction, and fail to produce truly deliberative democracy.

Contrary to the cyber-postmodernists and other researchers who are cautious about the Internet as a public sphere, a number of Internet-democracy commentators have proposed that online communications may facilitate the Habermasian public sphere of communicative rationality and new communication technologies offer resources for its revitalization. Some argue that the claims of cyberspace inducing a state of hyperreality are exaggerated and the public sphere conception does in fact adequately cater for the forms of interaction and subjectivity that develop through online communication. (O'Brien, 1999) Papacharissi (2002) argues that the lack of solid commitment negates the true potential of the Internet as a public sphere. He suggested that cyberspace extends out channels for communication, without radically affecting the nature of communication itself and it facilitate greater, but not necessarily more diverse participation in political discussion. By separating sites of 'authentic fantasy' (eg. MUDs and IRCs) from sites of 'real authenticity' (email, Usenet, and Web publishing), Dahlberg (2001) argues that the latter is more likely to contain rational-critical deliberations. He pointed out that cyber-interactions remain very much integrated into offline material existence, drawing from as well as adding to participants' social and mental make up. By exploring actual cyberspace experiences of selfhood, Dahlberg (2002) concluded



that the Internet does indeed alter interactions in new ways, but that the changes that result are not as radically hyper-real as some cyber-theorists claim, and further more, these changes are able to be taken into account by the public sphere. He is optimistic about the prospect of on-line deliberative democracy, believing that under appropriate structural management of the discourse, the Internet may become a means to expand the public sphere (Dahlberg, 2001). The public sphere can take into account the multiplication of subjectivity that occurs online. It does not assume a unitary knowing subject in face-to-face interaction, but an intersubjectivity where rationality is formed in discourse. The Internet may actually enhance the public sphere (also enhance democracy and dialogue) but it does so in a way that is not comparable to our past experience of public discourse (Papacharissi, 2002).

Previous research showed that there are people who talk politics online who do not do so in face-to-face situations, thus the Internet provides a new context for political conversation and brings new voices into the public sphere (Stromer-Galley, 2002). But some others say that much of the political discussion taking place online does not sound different from that taking place in casual or formal face-to-face interaction (Papacharissi, 2002).

Beyond these, there are other reasons why the Internet needs to be studied in relation to the notion of the public sphere. First, it is perceived as a means for opening and expanding spaces for public and political action; Second, 'cyberspace' redefined the conception of space and thus restructured the relation

between the technology used and communication processes between included social agents; furthermore, communication technologies are successfully implemented in democratic processes in order to extend the existing public sphere. (Oblak, 2002)

### 2.3. A Brief History of blog and its Development in China

Blogs, a short term of 'weblogs', are on-line diaries with links to Web sites of presumed interest such as traditional media outlets and other blogs. It is a relatively new form of mainstream personal communication, like email, cell phone, Instant Message and Web pages. Mortensen and Walker (2002) define it as 'frequently updated websites, usually personal, with commentary and links'. A blogger filters a mass of information, choosing the items that interest him or that are relevant to his chosen topic, commenting upon them, demonstrating connections between them and analyzing them. Evan Williams, one of the creators of the popular blogging tool Blogger, defines blog as having these three characters: Frequency, Brevity, and Personality. He emphasized that what was significant about blogs was the format instead of the content (Turnbull, 2001).

Blog was originated in the mid 1990s when some web designers put up personal journals on their home pages and linked to each other. Some of the blogging pioneers built tools that allow anyone to create and maintain a blog, no matter how little Internet savvy he or she possesses. In July 1999, Andrew Smales launched the first do-it-yourself blog tool – Pitas.com. He says the explosion of blog tools was simply a matter of critical mass (Jensen, 2003).



Blogs developed so fast these days, that some believe there are possibly millions of blogs produced worldwide.<sup>ii</sup> A growing number of public-spirited blogs has also emerged to amplify the voices of politicians, pundits, scholars, researchers, and journalists (Rosenbloom, 2004). Merriam-Webster even placed 'blog' at the top of its 10-words-of-the-year list for 2004.

Blog made its fame on Sep.11, 2001, when the major news websites such as CNN were blocked due to the sudden increase of visitors. Some personal blogs served as an alternative news sources and provided all sorts of information concerning the attack for the visitors. Thus, it is considered a rise of do-it-yourself journalism in the form of blogs (Halavais, 2002). During the Iraqi war in 2003, a blogger named Salam Pax, who is believed to be a then 29-year-old Iraqi boy, wrote about his experience inside Baghdad, and raised concern from all over the world. During the war, news organizations became alarmed when writers ranging 'from American naval officers to biological-warfare specialists and women soldiers posting their entries on the Internet from tents in the desert' (Grimson & Baxter, 2003)

Huge impacts have been made by blogs in Western politics. In the Ottawa Citizen, David Warren referred to blogs as a revolution in journalism and listed many occasions in which bloggers drew public attention to mistakes by the mainstream media. Besides, blogs often consist links to articles that readers might otherwise have missed, and thus make for informative reading (Mead, 2000). It's a new way of information management.

Blog as a new means of online communication platform was introduced into China in 2002 when the first Chinese blog site ([www.blogchina.com](http://www.blogchina.com)) was established by some Chinese internet activists. (Fang & Wang, 2003) The Chinese translation of blog is *Bo Ke*, in which *Bo* means wide and knowledgeable. Blogs boomed dramatically during the past several years.<sup>iii</sup> The year 2005 is widely believed to be the first year of the popularization of blogs in China. By the end of 2005, the number of internet users in China has reached 111 million.<sup>iv</sup> In a previous survey conducted by CNNIC in July 2005,<sup>v</sup> blog was used by 10.5% of the internet users, but the number increased to 16.6% half a year later.<sup>vi</sup>

There is no one authoritative source of the actual number of the blogs in China. An investigative report<sup>vii</sup> says that there are 16,000,000 blogs by the end of 2005. But according to the world famous blog search engine *Technorati*, there are today 140,000,000 blogs in the world, among which 33,000,000 bloggers are in China. The data provided by the Chinese Telecom Consulting Company Analysis International shows the number is well over 40,000,000.

Mu Zimei, one of blogging pioneers in China and a journalist in Guangzhou, got her fame by writing online personal sexual dairies in 2003. This is regarded as one of the major incidents in the development of China's blogs. In addition to bloggers who use the service as an online diary, there are those who use blogs as a form of 'participatory journalism' discussing news, politics and government policy. The Chinese government actively regulates and restricts the Internet,



including blogs, by employing a combination of legal and technological mechanisms to maintain information control. Due to the censorship, some of the bloggers chose to post on the overseas blog sites. Thus, the function of blogs in China is more limited compared with their western counterparts in terms of interactions with the mainstream media and enhancing social movements, and this makes the case of China different from the western models as introduced above.

## 2.4. Blogs and the Public Sphere

After its popularization around 2000 and its booming after 911 and Iraqi war, blog has become one of the most important newly emerged ways of online communication after email, instant message and BBS. One of the major influences of it in western world is its impact on the mainstream media. It is regarded as a potential alternative media that empowers the grassroots-journalism (Gillmor, 2004), while others are discussing whether it really changes the way and value of traditional journalists, or Anglo-Saxon media professionalism. (Wall, 2005; Matheson, 2004) There are also researches on the possibility of blogosphere serving as an ideal communication sphere, or a public sphere. (Thompson, 2003; Wijnia, 2003) Contrary to the western world, the new technology's appropriation in China has produced something different from what has already been observed in US or UK. Thus, a case study can empirically provide us with a broader picture of blogosphere by involving more variations into the research, and improve our knowledge in online public sphere.

Scholars have begun to think whether blogs can serve as an ideal site for communication. Opinions vary in whether blogs can be regarded as a new form of public sphere. Even the concept of blog itself remains to be conceptualized. Gill (2004) listed seven primary characteristics of a blog, which include: reverse chronological journaling (format); regular, date-stamped entries (timeliness); links to related news articles, documents, blog entries within each entry (attribution); archived entries (old content remains accessible); links to related blogs (blogrolling); RSS or XML feed (ease of syndication) and Passion (voice). A genre and content analysis of 203 randomly-selected blogs showed that the blog is neither fundamentally new nor unique, and contrary to what blog authors, journalists and scholars thought, they are more individualistic rather than oriented towards external events. (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus & Wright, 2004).

### **Pros**

From a communicative perspective, Wijnia (2004) defined weblog as follows:

‘The weblog, or blog, is a webpage on which the author publishes pieces with the intention to start conversation.’

She further explained that this communicative intention of weblogs is achieved by a comment function to enable dialogue within the same blog; a trackback function to track conversation through different blogs; and RSS or Atom feed function to encourage people to read the blog continuously. By applying the framework of Van Dijk (1999), she demonstrated the differences



between blog and other online communication channels, namely chat, forum, and web page. Instead of usually one sided as web pages, blogs are two and more sided communication. The stimuli richness and information complexity of blogs are superior to online forums. Thus, blogs bridge the difference between web pages and forums. It is more suited to discuss complex topics and has a low selectivity of the audiences. Wijnia (2004) answered the question of whether blogs serve as an ideal speech situation as Habermas proposed. She judged it by the three criteria of equal access, absence of power differences and truthfulness. She concluded that blogs can indeed serve as a platform for ideal speech situations, and form a better platform for discourse than traditional media.

Kahn & Kellner (2004) also expressed their optimism towards blogging because bloggers have demonstrated themselves as techno-activists favoring 'not only democratic self-expression and networking, but also global media critique and journalistic sociopolitical intervention'. As a new evolution of web-based experience, blogs make the idea of a dynamic network of ongoing debate, dialogue and commentary central and so emphasize the interpretation and dissemination of alternative information to a heightened degree. Some researches have shown that blogging is already producing its celebrities.

## **Cons**

Some scholars don't demonstrate so high an expectation of blog as a public sphere. What seems to come through in the rhetoric and aesthetic of blogs is the power given to the local, the specific, and the individual (Griffis, 2005).

‘Bloggers are valued, not for their objectivity and disinterestedness, but for their overt perspective and personality in how they filter through the haystack of media to find the needle that pricks interest.’ Thus, here, what used to be called ideology is regarded as the merit of blogs. Thompson (2003) argued that this so-called virtual community promotes what Habermas calls ‘mere opinion’ rather than ‘public opinion’. His research on the Trent Lott affair seems to show a further fragmenting and specialization of the public sphere. Although blogs are more open than traditional media, he doesn’t see it as revolutionary a change as once thought: ‘We are likely to find not a public sphere but a lot of bubbles isolating writers by ideology’. Thompson’s notion is shared by Baoill (2004b), who claimed that there are structural impediments in the current implementation of weblogs-both in terms of production and reception- that seriously damage any claim of the blogosphere to be a strong public sphere. His reasons includes that the propagation network of the blogosphere system serves to privilege some A-list bloggers over others, the time commitment needed makes blogging most attractive to students, academics, and certain professionals, and not all topics are equally subject to rational debate. Keren (2004) analyzed diary entries posted over five years by one master blogger and found that the new emancipation is achieved by self-representation on the Internet. He suggested that this kind of emancipation is associated with ‘the politics of melancholy’, characterized by preference for virtual reality, formation of a cult-like community and political passivity. He pointed out that if this hypothesis is true, then deliberative



democracy cannot be salvaged by the present emancipation on the blogs due to the lack of active citizens.

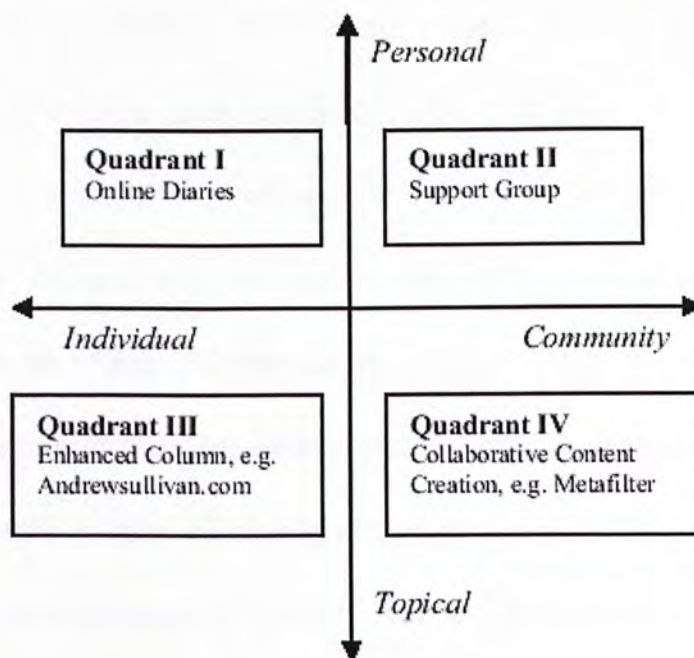
The above can be summarized into two camps: for those who agree that blog is public sphere, they see blogs opening up new ways of communication, compensating the drawbacks of web pages and online forums, and providing a free and equal sphere for discussion. For those who disagree, they found blogs too individual, the discourses not always rational, and the participants not active enough. Besides, the power and advantage is inclined to those A-list bloggers. Thus the problem lies in whether the personalized feature of blogs, including its personal touch and unbalanced power distribution, destroyed the blogs potential as an online public sphere, if other conditions fulfilled. Further more, if the identity politics standing out in the blogosphere blurred the boundary between private and public, if this tension can be settled and how.

## 2.5. Blogs and Journalism

As have exemplified in the previous part, blog demonstrated its influence after the 911 incident and during the Iraqi war when the traditional media coverage of the news events were insufficient and inaccessible to the mass people, thus people search online for alternative sources. Fulton (1996) describes the online environment as a challenge to the practices of journalism, and it gives journalistic reformers an ideal opening to try new ideas. Gillmor (2004) wrote in his book *We the Media* that the collision of journalism and technology is having major consequences for journalists, newsmakers, and the audience. Being one of

the first bloggers among the mainstream journalists, he called his blog interactive journalism and his readers being his collaborators. He called this evolution a transformation ‘from journalism as lecture to journalism as a conversation’.

Andrew Sullivan (2002), a famous columnist publishing both online and offline<sup>viii</sup>, claimed that blogging is changing the media world and could foment a revolution in how journalism functions in our culture. There are two things that distinguish blogs from web magazines. First, blogs have a personal touch. Second, blogs seize the means of production. Thus, blogs can be seen as existing somewhere on a spectrum between electronic journals and journalistic sites, between the writer’s own life and times and a relative objectivity. At their best, they can offer not only the quality of interchange and public discourse anticipated in early discussions of the Internet but also can have significant influence on mainstream coverage of news events. (Thompson, 2003)



**Types of blogs, Herring (2004)**



Herring (2004) built a model of four types of blogs. J-blogs can be also categorized into these four cells according to the form and content. Those blogs that mainly deal with personal lives of journalists as individuals can be seen as Online Dairies of journalists; those using blogs as a publishing space for columns and reports of different concerns can be regarded as Enhanced Columns; those created by a group of journalists together and cover a variety of topics belong to Collaborative Content Creation; and those that shared by a group of journalists but concern those affairs inside their personal circle, can be seen as Support Groups. Since the majority of the posts in Anti Blog concern topics of news and politics, it falls well into the type of Enhanced Column.

Through a case study of a weblog produced by the British *Guardian* newspaper, Matheson (2004) explored the epistemological differences between the blog and the dominant Anglo-American news form. The *Guardian* weblog established a different interpersonal relation, a different authority and a journalism focused upon connection rather than fact. He concluded that the weblog is grounded in traditional notions of the role of the journalists, but provides evidence of those notions undergoing some change. Journalists are finding ways of doing mainstream journalism that escape some of the limitations of the dominant form. He also promoted further interview-based researches to establish the validity of these exploratory findings. There are studies showing that blogs are challenging the traditional norms of news production. Comparing with the norm of reporter objectivity, j-blogs exemplified a feeling of agency.

They tend to be nonlinear and interactive, and suggesting a postmodern style of writing as well as postmodern journalism. They are the corporate answer to the internet, and to independent bloggers. (Robinson, 2006) Yet, at this stage, it remains unknown what j-blogs mean for community, democracy and journalistic authority.

Besides, for bloggers, 'the imperative is to publish, then to filter, or to be as concerned with unmaking and testing public opinion as forming it'. They are based on the values such as immediacy, transparency, interconnectivity, and proximity to the events, which is very different from traditional media. (Carroll, 2004) By negotiating reputation and creating and exchanging social capital, individuals who blog encourage and reward participation. Besides, blogs have blurred the boundary of journalists and non-journalists. Some amateur journalists picked up the pieces that would otherwise be lost in the published news, and suddenly everybody can be a columnist, leave his/her own comments and make him/herself heard. As was mentioned in Columbia Journalism Review, you've got tens of thousands of potential columnists 'writing for free, fueled by passion and operating in a free market where the cream rises quickly'. (Welch, 2003)

As to the relationship between blogosphere and traditional media sphere, Drezner (2004) examined the distribution of readers across the array of blogs, and the interactions between significant blogs and traditional media outlets, and found that blogs can socially construct an agenda or interpretive frame that acts as a focal point for mainstream media, shaping and constraining the larger



political debate. In a purpose of conceptualizing the blog, Baoill (2004) defined the blog in a model with three different aspects: first, based on the basic format, blogs are websites with posts in reverse-chronological order; Second, in terms of audience, there is a division between those blogs that deal with personal issues and expect an audience known to the author, and those that place themselves in the public sphere, addressing a more general audience. And finally, in terms of the organization of the weblog, they can be categorized into those as a hobby, an income generating operation, or a professional operation. This model will be applied in my analysis of the Chinese journalism blogs. I assume that Anti blog aims at reaching a broader audience instead of just serving as a personal dairy keeping, and it is not money driven, but more close to profession operation. These characters of journalism blogs will influence the property of these blogs conducted by professional journalists in various ways.

## 2.6. Media and Journalism in China

The Chinese economic reform has brought about huge changes in the Chinese society. Given the different social, cultural and political background, new insights are needed in analyzing the Chinese media in this era. Schramm's Soviet Union model no longer copes with the media reality in today's China, and transitional approach is proposed as a possible substitute. (Huang, 2003) China in the post-Mao era has transferred from state socialism to market socialism, and the media system is experiencing a transformation from a single-purpose propaganda instrument to a multifunctional and multi-structured system. The

Chinese media has been economically more independent of the state, more commercialized and reader/audience-oriented.

These undergoing changes have huge impact on the Chinese journalism. Much of the contradiction and ambiguity in Chinese journalism can be attributed to a struggle to reduce ideological dissonance as well as to the pulling forces of a burgeoning market economy. (He, 2000) The concept of the audience becomes part of the institutional arrangement of Chinese media and extends the basis of legitimacy for journalistic work, making way for the possibility of pluralistic news reporting and diversified media management. (Zhang, 2000) However, though the Leninist model no longer applies to today's media practice in China, media is not able to provide sufficient space for open and reasoned debate on public affairs. (Liu, 2003)

Although the Chinese Communist Party still has the will and ability to control the media, two decades of economic reforms have allotted media organizations more autonomy. (Chan & Qiu, 2002) Accordingly, professional journalism has emerged as a direct competitor to the party-journalism paradigm. Pan and Chan's research (2003) found that Chinese journalists see professional news media as more desirable than party organs and appropriate Western journalism professionalism into the Chinese context. He's (2000) study shows that Chinese journalists adopt one of the five modes to cope with the inevitable dissonance with the dominant ideologies, including living with dissonance in the public discourse universe; striking a consonance with Communist ideology;



consonance in the public discourse universe but independent expression in the private discourse universe; pushing boundaries in public discourse universe while keeping independent expression in private discourse universe; and radical reduction of dissonance by aligning with a different ideology and expressing deviant ideas in a different public discourse universe. The Chinese journalists are searching for new definitions of the roles of the media and require press freedom. I assume that the journalism blogs in China will reflect the previous changes in China's journalists and their discourse in their blogs will be a negotiation between online discourse and the offline media discourse to which they officially belong. Different journalism blogs fill in different categories of He's model respectively.

It is arguable whether many existing conceptions of the relations between technology and society formulated in the Western context of late capitalism are applicable in Chinese society. The most intriguing idiosyncrasy about the Internet in China is that, despite the technology's liberalizing potential, its high speed of growth can be maintained within the framework in the current political system dominated by the Communist Party. (Qiu, 2004) Yet it's still hard to tell who is going to be the final winner as long as the Internet censorship and the challenges to this censorship are still struggling. (Zhao, 2004)

Since 1994, Chinese government has tightened their control over the Internet and serious of Internet regulations were made. These regulations gave the government wide discretion to arrest and punish any form of expression. In

1994, one year before the Internet became commercially available for individuals in China, the State Council issued the PRC Regulations for the Safety Protection of Computer Information Systems which gave the Ministry of Public Security overall responsibility for supervision of the Internet. On October 1, 2000, the State Council issued *Measures for Managing Internet Information Services* and *Telecommunications Regulations of the People's Republic of China*. This control over the Internet penetrated from business sectors to news and journalistic sectors. On September 25, 2005, Ministry of Information Industry and the State Council jointly issued the new *Rules on the Administration of Internet News Information Services*, which impose restrictions on the reporting of politics, the economy, the military and foreign affairs by local Chinese journalists. Web sites are banned from reporting information that endangers 'national security' and 'national interest'. Blogs and personal web pages have to 'be directed towards serving the people and socialism and insist on correct guidance of public opinion for maintaining national and public interests'. The overall aim of the new rule is to ensure the disappearance of 'unhealthy news stories that will easily mislead the public'. This new rule, together with other previous regulations serve as tools for the government to further censor the news and information, especially political expressions online. It is against this great firewall that Chinese journalists are practicing journalism and facing risks of being blocked, threatened, arrested or even imprisoned.



## 2.7. Identity and Public Sphere

Identity is not an essentialist one, but a strategic and positional one. (Hall, 1996)

It is a process of construction which is always 'in process' and never completed. It is fragmented and fractured, multiply constructed across different discourses practices and positions. All identities operate through exclusion, through the discursive construction of a constitutive outside and the production of abjected and marginalized subjects. (Butler, 1993) Castells (1997) contextualized the definition of identity in the network society. Identities are stronger sources of meaning than roles, due to the fact that they involve self-construction and individuation. Identities organize the meaning, instead of functions. Subjects are no longer built on the basis of the disintegrating civil society, but they grow from communal resistance.

An identity is a complex personal and social construct, consisting in part of who we think ourselves to be, how we wish others to perceive us, and how they actually perceives us. Goffman (1959) has been regarded as one of the pioneer commenters of identity politics. One of his major arguments is that there is no essence of an individual waiting to be expressed. Instead, the self is a production of social situations. He distinguished 'personal identity' from 'self-identity'. The former refers to those characteristics and facts which set off the individual person in the minds of other people, while the latter refers to 'the subjective sense of his own situation and his own continuity and character'. In his famous book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Goffman, 1959) he focuses on the

individual's active role in advancing a particular conception of self to others, or 'the production of self'. But he also emphasizes that individuals are not able to choose freely what kind of images they want to produce for themselves, but rather are constrained to define themselves in congruence with the statuses, roles, and relationships they accorded by the social order. In his view, self is a social product, but individuals do manipulate the social situations and others' impression strategically to fashion the images of themselves.

Goffman also uses a series of metaphors, such as drama, ritual, and game, to draw attention to the manipulative and morality aspects of social life. It was his contention that everyday life was a performance, and that our behaviors and attitudes could be explained in terms of a theatrical metaphor. His work has been instrumental in helping to understand how elements of performance contribute to what and how people communicate. What a person 'really is' is not as important as 'the sense he provides them through his dealings with them of what sort of person he is behind the role he is in.' (Goffman, 1974) Public agreement on identities does not necessarily reflect the actor's private beliefs. Whatever the private might be, it is the public, socially agreed upon definition of the situation that will guide the interaction. (O'Brien, 2006) Many researchers have echoed Goffman's fascination with the theatrical metaphor and have invoked similar language in attempting to explain how people construct identities online. (Wood & Smith, 2001) One of a recent application of Goffman's theory is a study on personal homepages. (Cheung, 2004) The researcher found that personal



homepages is an emancipatory media genre for some people. It allows much more strategic self-presentation and is more subject to manipulation. It is also a space for reflexive identity construction because it provides 'coherent' self-narrative as Giddens (1991) suggested. But this emancipatory potential of homepages have not benefit everyone, due to the fact that many people lack the resources and technological knowledge to build their personal homepage.

By making a comparison between Habermas and Goffman, Wolfe (1997) found that the former devotes little attention to the private world, while the latter regard people in public life perform themselves and manipulating their impressions. He made the conclusion that both the private and the public are essential to the way we live, because 'we cannot take care of our public business without recognizing that we have private selves, and we cannot appreciate a private self unless we understand ourselves as public creature'.

Calhoun (1997) pointed out that a central paradox of Habermas is 'the public sphere depends on an organization of private life that enables and encourages citizens to rise above private identities and concerns.' He provides two solutions for this paradox, which is to abandon the idea of single public sphere and to add identity-formation into the process of public life. He and other scholars such as Negt and Kluge (1993) believe that experience is not something exclusively prior to and only addressed by the rational-critical discourse of the public sphere. Instead, it is constituted through public sphere. It is hard to separate identity-formation from topical debate.

One of the problems we are constantly puzzled, especially in the online world, is that why people frequently fail to meet the requirement of the ideal type of public sphere. The overemphasis of Habermas' ideal type on rational-critical discourse and his belief in deliberative communication, were all in doubt. Since Habermas regards public sphere as a place where private persons resemble to discuss public issues, the private should be the precondition of the public. Can Goffman's dimension help to explain the limitation of Habermas' model?



## Chapter 3: Research Question and Research Methods

### 3.1. Research Scope and the Selected Sample

In this paper, I define ‘journalism blogs’ as those blogs created by journalists, who work as a professional journalist at a traditional media off line and write online in personal blogs. I make such a definition and limit my focus accordingly due to the following reasons: first, I am interested in the potential of communicative actions in these journalists’ blogs. I want to see if they can provide a better platform for public discussion. Second, one of the major differences between these blogs and the huge amount of online personal diaries is that they tend to focus more on political issues instead of mere private life. They are different from the online life diary, because their concern is generally beyond one’s private life, but extend to broader social and political issues. Third, since blogs are regarded as more context based and personally embodied than other form of online communication forms, I want to study what new features this embodied journalism online brings to the Internet and public sphere. Fourth, I want to explore the online and offline relationship between the online publishing and the offline journalists groups, as well as their power relationship with the broader social context, including the contemporary Chinese media ecology, market power and government censorship.

Last but not least, blog is also a site of identity politics. Although any means of online communication involves conscious or unconscious expression of one’s identity, blog provides a specific channel, through which the blogger can

construct his identity efficiently and effectively. I am interested in the boundary between public and private, which can be well presented in this online personalized but at the same time, public virtual sphere. I see j-blog as a good example of exploring the boundary between the two. It can offer us a chance to investigate into the conflict and relationship between the ideal of public sphere and the identity construction process involved.

### 3.2. A Single Case Study of Anti blog

Anti blog (*Subtitle: 'Everyday thinking on politics and news'*) was established on December 2004. Although it survived for only one year, it reached a daily visit of 15,000 before it was shut down by the Chinese government in December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2005. It was first established in blog-city.com (<http://anti.blog-city.com/>), and lasted for half a year when the government blocked the Scotland-based blog site. Anti shifted his blog to MSN Spaces (<http://spaces.msn.com/mranti/>) in August 2005. Dramatically, his Space was shut down for a second time in December with his blog-site inaccessible. After that, he dropped blogging and shift to E-Magazine production. Anti used to be a journalist in 21st Century Global News, until it was shut down by Chinese government in 2003. He is now working as a researcher at New York Times, Beijing Bureau. He also writes articles for some Chinese newspapers and magazines as a columnist. His blog posts cover vast issues in politics and culture. Since its establishment, it has attracted the attention within and out of the journalists circle, and the two shut down events raised concerns from both online

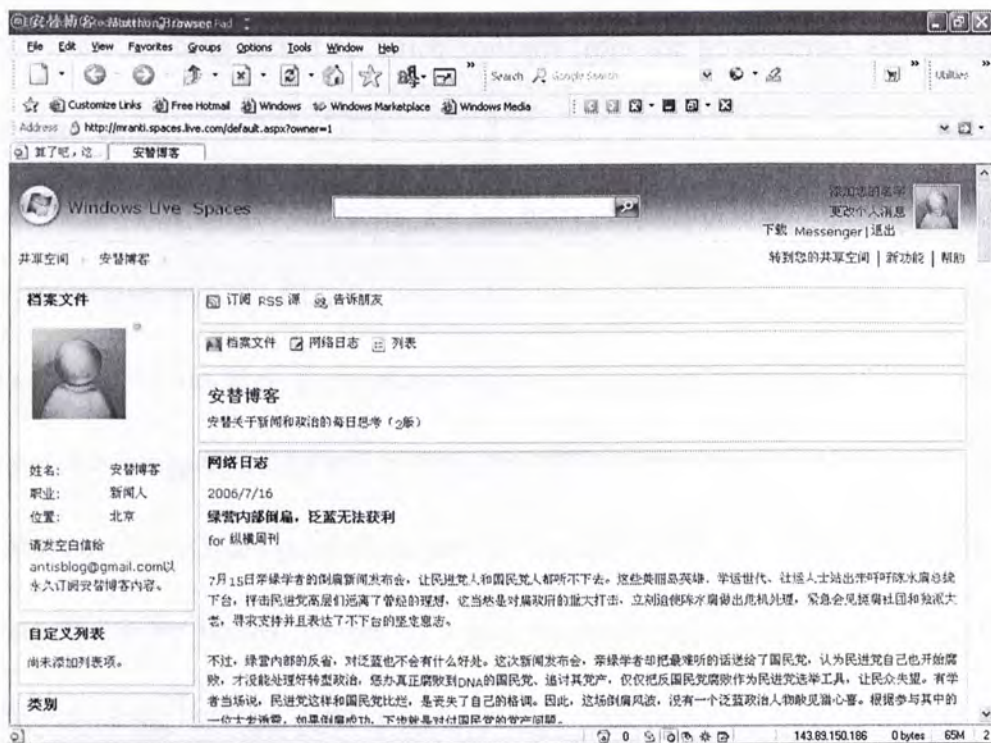


and offline, especially among foreign media and organizations. He was elected judge of 2005 'The Best of the Blogs' Competition held by Deutsche Welle, and has promoted other Chinese blogs to the world. He is both an internet activists and a pro-democracy journalist.

In Yin's (2003) classical book *Case Study Research Design and Methods*, he pointed out that case study is applied when a 'how' or 'why' question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control. It is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon and deals with the phenomenon and the context. It copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points. Case study is not the only method that can be applied in analyzing j-blogs in China, but my purpose of research is to contextualize the blogosphere in China, and answer the question of 'how' and 'why'. I believe that a single embedded case study is an appropriate way to concentrate on one blog as a study subject and fully explore and explain the previous questions.



Anti blog on blog-city



Anti blog on Microsoft MSN Space

An embedded single-case design is one that involves only one case, but several units of analysis. There are three rationales for a single case design (Yin,



2003), which are critical case, extreme/unique case, representative/typical case, revelatory case and longitudinal case. Among these three rationales, I found Anti blog meets the criteria of being both a critical and an extreme case. The majority of the posts are about political issues, covering Chinese democracy, media freedom, Taiwan issues, and other current major political events and news. It is a good case to look into public sphere theory, which concerns human emancipation through deliberation and political discussion. Besides, the fate of the blog locates very well into China's context and provides us with clues for the internet political discussion in China. Secondly, the twice shut down of the blog is rather an extreme situation. In fact there are other political blogs that were active online, but why is Anti blog raised so much concern from the government and at the same time being so influential home and abroad? Besides, Anti, the journalist himself is rather a unique character. He has been promoting and empowering the blog development in China, especially among Chinese journalists and intellectuals. He has high expectations for what blog can be done in China. His identity of a blogger online and a journalist offline presents a good example of the relationship between public and private. Besides, when the majority of blogs remain visited by limited people in a low frequency and dealing with private issues, Anti blog belongs to those that use the blogosphere as a new platform of online political discussion. Thus, a case study of Anti blog can contribute to our understanding of j-blogosphere and how blogs serve as a public sphere to a greatest extent.

The blogosphere is composed of many elements. I use an embedded single case study because a blogosphere can be divided into different levels of analysis: first, the posts and comments as unite of analysis (textual analyzing sentences and words); second, the themes as unite of analysis (content analyzing the themes of the posts); third, blogs as unite of analysis (when discussing the relationship between Anti blog and other j-blogs). I encompass case study with other research methods, including content analysis, textual analysis, and in-depth interview.

### 3.3. Research Questions:

An online public sphere is still a form of public sphere, so it must meet basic public sphere criteria. (Poor, 2005) Various scholars proposed their criteria of public sphere according to Habermas' definition. Baoill (2004) sees the following three as criterion for meeting Habermas's model: inclusivity of access, a disregard for external rank, and the potential for rational debate of any topic under consensus. Wijnia(2004) analyzed blogs using the three conditions to be fulfilled: equal access, absence of power differences and truthfulness.

One of the most frequently mentioned criteria was proposed by Dahlberg. By studying the previous researches on Internet and public sphere, Dahlberg (2001, 2004) pointed out that quantitative studies (mainly content analysis and survey) are not adequate and qualitative studies have to be involved because the complex practices that constitute the public sphere cannot be fully operationalised into discrete variables for measurement. Qualitative research of



the Net-public sphere can get at meanings not accessible through quantitative measurement. His suggestion of possible indicators and corresponding methods for evaluation is as follows:

1. *Autonomy from state and economic power.* (participant self-reporting)
2. *Thematisation and reasoned critique of problematic validity claims.* (Content Analysis)
3. *Reflexivity.* (Participant observation, content/discourse analysis, self-reporting through interview, survey or focus group)
4. *Ideal role taking.* (content analysis, discourse analysis, observation and participant interview)
5. *Sincerity.* (Intense observation, self-reporting)
6. *Inclusion and discursive equality.* (survey, interview)

Based on his suggestion, I proposed openness, deliberativeness, equality and independent of state and market power as the criteria of judging whether Anti blog is a public sphere. (See RQ1)

The personalized feature of the blogosphere not only influences its relationship with public sphere, but also in the identity and authority construction of the bloggers. Thus, a close look at this process is necessary to make up for the part that cannot be covered by the public sphere theory. (See RQ2) By building bridge between the first two research questions, I will elaborate them in answering the third question of what the study of Anti blog can contribute to our

rethinking of the relationship between public and private, and what the personalized characters mean to the ideal of public sphere. (See RQ3)

**1. RQ1: Is Anti blog an online public sphere? Why?**

In answering this question, six sub-questions are proposed:

- 1) Is Anti blog open to access?
- 2) Is the discussion deliberative and rational?
- 3) Is the discussion on Anti blog equal?
- 4) What is the relationship between Anti blog and other blogs?
- 5) What is the relationship between Anti blog and mass media?
- 6) What is the relationship between Anti blog and the state power?

**2. RQ2: How are Anti's identity and authority constructed in the blogosphere?**

**3. RQ3: How do the personalized characters influence the blogosphere and the understanding of public sphere?**

**3.4. Qualitative methods:**

1. *Textual analysis* of the posts, comments and format of the two Anti blogs: this is to answer both RQ1 and RQ2. Not only the wordings and organizations of the posts and comments will be studied, the unique format of blogs will also be investigated. The two open questions in the online survey will also be textual analyzed so that more feedbacks from the readers' sides can be collected. This serves as the data for the first three questions of RQ1 and RQ2.



2. *In-depth Interviews* with Anti about his blogging experience. The interview was conducted in International Club in Beijing, on March 7<sup>th</sup> 2006, and it lasted for 3 hours. Later on, we met each other online through MSN to make up for the information missed in the previous interview. This group of data is to support the online survey and help to enrich the details of the identity construction parts from the blogger's side. And the last three questions of RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3 are related to this part.
3. *Participant Observation* There are several kinds of online ethnographic research methods, of which I choose the strategy of 'participant as observer'. I've been a frequent visitor of Anti blog since it started in the end of 2004. I visited the blog on a day to day base, read through the posts and comments and experienced the shut down of the blog. This direct experience accompanied with the ups and downs of Anti blog increased my knowledge and feelings of his blog. I also frequently read other j-blogs and make comparisons between them. Although I can not represent other participants, it does get me closer to a reader's role and feeling.
4. *Document Study* Various documents were studied including the Internet policies, foreign and domestic media coverage, and other related documents to the Chinese journalism and internet. This helps to provide a broader picture of the relationship between the society, government and the journalism in China today. RQ5 and RQ6 are related to this part of the data.

### 3.5. Quantitative method:

An *online survey* was conducted. Using the mass mailing list made by Anti after his blog was closed, I sent around 1400 people through email, inviting them to fill in the online questionnaire. The survey was posted on the online survey website my3q.com on March 14, 2006, and it lasted until May 19, 2006. A total of 408 valid questionnaires were collected. The purpose of the survey is to understand the using behavior of those who visited Anti blog. Except for the 23 multiple choice questions, two open-ended questions were posted, allowing the readers to propose their ideas about Anti blog in their own words. Another 4 questions asked the basic information of the readers. This online interview provided me the basic information of readers' blog reading behavior and their attitude towards the blog and blogger. The data was applied in RQ1 and RQ2.

Like most of the online survey, this survey cannot avoid the self-selection problem. Anti's mass-mailing list is a self-selective mailing list. He asked those who want to join the mailing list send him an email to get registered after the shut down of his second blog. Only those who are willing to keep themselves noticed of Anti's latest news, and later his e-magazines, would reply to him and join in the list. For those who accepted my invitation and filled out the online survey, they are more active and passionate about Anti blog and have a certain degree of concern for j-blog. Even though 80% of them don't know him in person, they are more interested in his blog than the rest of the readers who did not reply.



## Chapter 4: Findings

### 4.1 Anti blog as an alternative public sphere

The concept of public sphere in Habermas' sense is an ideal type. It was later questioned by other scholars from especially the postmodern point of view. (McKee, 2005) Not only does Fraser (1992) doubt that such a public sphere is actually a male-dominated sphere, but such modern themes as rationality, equality, or even public are given different meanings among different scholars. But it is still worthwhile to apply this historical metaphor to the research in China because both of its complexity and unsettlement in meaning. (Dirlik, 1993)

The six sub-questions are both interwoven and closely connected with the personalized characters of blogosphere. I will first try to answer them respectively, make a brief conclusion after each question, and discuss them as a whole at the last session of this chapter.

#### **4.1.1. The openness of Anti blog**

The public sphere rests upon the idea of universality, which means it must be accessible to all citizens of society. (Dahlgren, 2001) The explosion in blog popularity is due to the freedom it provides in both the low cost of establishing a blog and the free access of those who are able to get online. (Kuhns & Crew, 2006) In other words, it is both cheap in terms of cost to create a blog as well as to participate in a blog. At the same time, the blogger doesn't need to take much time and effort in designing, posting and organizing his blog, thus making it much easier to publish online compared with personal WebPages.

There are two aspects of openness in the case of public sphere: first, the

accessibility of the blog; second, the variety of opinions to be expressed on the blog.

Anti blog is free to access both in terms of its technological accessibility as well as the fact that no extra pay is needed for visiting. Type in the address and you can visit all his posts in a reverse chronicle order. Thus, some call it 'coming out of the gift economy'. Rosen (2003) called online j-blogging as a gift to those who use it, as opposed to the offline journalism, which belongs to the market economy. But it is obvious that one has to get access to the Internet. This surely excludes 1 billion Chinese citizens who are not Internet users at all.

One of the survey questions asks the blog users to score the level of openness, or whether different kinds of voices can be presented on Anti blog<sup>ix</sup>. The average score is 4.80 (1 for the lowest degree and 7 for the highest). The way to present different views on the blogosphere can be seen from two aspects: First, whether the posts are open to different points of views. Second, whether the comments left by the readers can be regarded as presenting different views.

### **Posts**

The posts of the blog reflected the blogger's stand point and his understanding of a certain issue. This contrasts with the requirement of a balanced point of view as what generally happened in traditional journalism. This character has a lot to do with the nature of the posts. Among a total of 187 posts of Anti blog (127 from Blog-city and 60 from MSN Spaces), 33 (or 17.6%) are directly quoted from other sources including online articles and offline media as Anti's recommendations. The remaining majority (154 posts, or 82.4%) are original



writings in a style closer to columns instead of news writings. Among the 154 original posts, 22 were drafts of columns or editorials for newspapers and magazines. For the rest 132 posts, they turned out to be even more individualized than columns, with more strong and private emotion involved in elaborating all sorts of issues.

Take Taiwan issue as an example. Although Anti stands firmly on the side of pro-reunification (Pan-blue) camp, he also opposes the authoritarian rule in mainland China, which in his mind is an obstacle for the reunification. He believes there is no need or possibilities for reunification between the two sides, unless the mainland is as democratized as Taiwan. There is a clear position in his elaboration, and he argues for this stand point through out the 32 posts on the topic. Each of his articles has a clear and consistent argument, the aim of which is to help elaborating his pro-unification and pro-democracy view points. His blog serves as a filter, and he tries to invite the readers to be exposed to what can not be generally heard or seen from the mainstream media, especially through *his* channel. By doing so, he is selling his ideas, making himself stand out of the market of opinions. His points are personal and it is up to the readers to judge. The posts in the blog represent the voice of Anti. However, if we put it in a broader blogosphere, which includes more j-blogs and other personal political blogs interconnected with each other, then Anti's voice is among the various voices of bloggers. (See the later discussion in 4.1.5. The relationship between Anti blog and the other blogs)

## Comments

The user-friendly feature of blog also means that people can leave their comments after each post. The average amount of comments left on Anti blog is around 40, and the number can reach as high as more than 200 or 300. But this figure is not huge compared with the number of daily visits, which reached 10 thousand hits a day at its peak. The survey shows that 57% of the readers have never left any comment on Anti blog. And for those who did, 77% of them left less than 10 pieces.

Among the comments, there are pros and cons regarding Anti's posts. There can be serious debates both between the blogger and the commenters, and among commenters themselves. One of the readers said that he always read the comments so that he could learn views from different angles other than Anti's. *'I don't always agree with him, and I can hear different voices among the comments.'* For example, in a post of Dec. 29, 2004, Anti ironically criticized one of the most popular law professors of Peking University, who transformed himself into a government official. This post drew comments afterwards that criticized Anti as making his argument without sufficient and scientific arguments. Since the blogger has the right to delete any comments, there is always a risk that some comments can disappear from the blog. During the interview, Anti said he never delete any negative comments because he doesn't care about the criticism. *'Comments have their own system. They might quarrel between each other without any relationship with my post.'*<sup>x</sup> There remain a



certain number of negative or critical comments on his blog.

### **Summary**

Posts and comments enjoy different levels of openness. Anti's posts serve to deliver alternative information and support his political ideas with a clear pro-democracy attitude, while the comments turned out to be more diversified and open to discussion. But there is another phenomenon that needs to be noticed: only 36% of the audiences surveyed are frequent comments-readers, while the rest 64% of them don't have the habit of reading comments at all. For the majority of the audiences, they participate in Anti blog just to read Anti's posts instead of comments. There is a gap between what can be read on the blog and the real reading habit of the participants.

Anti blog is free to access, but it is not the only kind of online behavior that is free. What makes blogging unique is its special mechanism of encouraging individuals to publish online. BBS (Bulletin Board System), which also allows free posting, is more like a market of ideas, filled with fragmented pieces of discourse. But a blog can accumulate one's personal writings through the time line. Readers use blogs as extra channels of information, while the blogger is equipped with a new channel of publishing. The free use of the blog also makes possible the unequal relationship between the blogger and the user.

#### **4.1.2. The deliberation and rationality on Anti blog**

*'A scientific criticism has to be built upon scientific base, instead of simple labeling.'*<sup>xi</sup>

This is one of the comments that were left on Anti blog, criticizing one of Anti's

posts being unscientific. Deliberative discussion is regarded as an important criterion of public sphere if we see it as a way to realize democracy through communicative action. A deliberative discussion should be one that involves negotiation. People participating in the discussion should be trying to reach a consensus. To Habermas, consensus is reached through communicative action and the using of rationality.

More than 80% of the posts on Anti blog concern politics. The average score of the survey on how political Anti blog is ranked as high as 5.88 (1 for the lowest and 7 for the highest) and the degree of seriousness ranked 5.59. Although it is regarded, from the readers' point of view a rather political and serious blog, the rationality level ranked 5.04, lower than the former two aspects. Among the readers' critics<sup>xii</sup>, about half of them claim that Anti blog is too emotional and lacking rationality. For example:

*'His ways of expression is too passionate, thus I doubt if his rationality is limited.'*

*'He's too angry.'*

*'The blog is not diversified enough, so I feel it rather biased.'*

*'It's too emotional, a combination of nationalism and liberalism.'*

*'His blog is not rational enough and seems to be a bit naïve.'*

*'Anti's view is not all-around. Hope he can be more comprehensive and involve more opinions.'*

.....



The readers regard Anti blog being both rational and emotional. What does this personal emotion mean to the public sphere?

### **Case study: Taiwan Issue**

Take Taiwan issue as an example. Anti has observed the 2003 Taiwan election on the spot, and one of his major concerns is Taiwan politics. A total of 19 posts on his blog cover Taiwan issues. On one hand, he is using his political knowledge to give comments to the situations across the Strait, and promote a closer look of Taiwan politicians by profiling the political figures respectively. On the other hand, he never hesitates in expressing his love and hate. One of the posts is entitled *'Can you not walk further away, Taipei? In memory of my days in Taiwan'*. In this article he mentioned that as a native Nanjing people (the former capital of Republic of China), he has a special feeling towards the city of Taipei. *'The telephone code of Taipei is 02, and that of Kaohsiung is 07. Then, which city has the telephone code of 01? The answer is Nanjing. This answer made me fall in love with Taipei immediately and thoroughly, where people are still speaking the former mandarin of Nanjing.'*

In stead of using political analysis, he romanticized the city of Taipei and linked the city with his personal experience. He can understand those who pro-independence (Pan-green), but he cannot help himself not belonging to the camp of pro-unification (Pan-blue), because he claims that in his deepest soul, he believes that for those who are the decedents of Nanjing, they should have their own happiness in Taiwan. 'If there were no Green camp, I would like to live in

Taipei.’ The ending of the article is even more sentimental:

*‘I know that my idea can be regarded as masculine, chauvinism, and even cultural colonialism by the green camp. It is true that Taipei has to say goodbye to the split identity of the past and search for its own dream. I know the current situation between us can not make me ask you to stay. I respect your choice, but I just hope from my deepest heart, Taipei, please don’t walk further away. After we get democratized, we can sit down and make dreams together, a dream of Taipei and Nanjing.’*

Anti is not analyzing the political issues from merely a rational and political point of view. His personal feeling and his public political stance are often knit together. His words are powerful and persuasive in delivering the message of democracy and reunification. At one point, this power comes from the knowledge, the logic and the information he possessed and the way he motivated these elements to make arguments. While at the same time, it also comes from his personal experience, his identity (eg. in this case, as a Nanjing people), and his willingness to share his emotions with the readers at proper occasions.

### **Summary**

Habermas established an ideal of a social realm in which reason, not arbitrary will, is the basis of power. (Habermas, 1989) But here Anti applied a combination of reason and personal experience and emotion, which can have a rather moving affect among the readers. This rational/emotional approach is both a feature of personalized political expression, but also a supplementary to the



mere rational discourse. Although there are critics saying that he is too sensational in some occasions, there are readers who praised the information and independent thinking that Anti provided on his blog. He is regarded as courageous to speak out and offering alternative views of various social and political issues. This raises the question of the relationship between personal emotions and publicity in an online public sphere. If rationality is a must in judging the public sphere, then not all of the posts can be qualified as 100% rational discourse. In fact, it is not that Anti cannot keep up with a rational style of writing as he did in writing editorials and columns for newspapers, but that he doesn't want to be so seriously rational and political. As long as the blog is a personal space that is open to the public, he is constantly trying to negotiate his writings between the two. The superior position of the blogger combined with the emotional elements in his expression makes some readers feel that Anti may not allow others to make their own opinions. Anti not only blogs to sell his points, but also build up his online identity. Thus, the sensational sides of discourses emerge to make the whole picture.

#### **4.1.3. The equality in Anti blog**

##### **Between the blogger and the readers**

Anti used to be a famous name in several political BBS forums. He explains his transformation from a BBS activist to a blogger as a strategic one. One of the major differences between BBS forum and blog is the power distribution, or the state of equality.

*'It's too tiring work to express oneself in a forum. You are very easy to get sunk. You have to wait for others to reply. It is a big public platform... and a mass platform. What I want is a column'*<sup>xiii</sup>

He regarded BBS forum not an ideal place to *sell* one's point of view.

*'You are waiting for competition. But on BBS, the competition environment is beyond your control. I have always been a BBS activist, but I know that the cost to control a forum is huge.'*

Compared with BBS, blog provides a more ideal cyber space for bloggers if they want to exert their control with a much lower cost of time and effort. The design of the blog is just to serve this purpose. Blog-city, where Anti started blogging, provides both free service and Premium accounts. It is said in the homepage that *'Premium accounts! - If you want more control and a more feature rich environment - why not upgrade for just \$3.50 per month.'* The paid account provides another 30 advanced features for the blogger to get *a better control* of his blog. These advanced features helped the blogger to conduct blog mirror, to do detailed statistics on the overall usage of the blog, to backup the blog data, as well as to track back. Anti used the premium accounts from the very beginning so that he can make the most out of blogging, including tracing the effect of his blog and being informed of the quotation of his blog. All these are to help him exert a better control over his space.

*Control* is a hidden key word of blogging. The basic form of the blog realized this control by separating posts that can only be created by bloggers and



the comments that both bloggers and readers can create. Nevertheless, only bloggers are granted the right to delete any comments. The survey shows that the readers of Anti blog generally pay much more attention on the posts as opposed to the comments. 47% of them read the posts sentence by sentence, and only 8.6% of them read merely titles and major points. 35.8% of the readers are frequent readers of the comments. In the interview, Anti admitted that he doesn't care much about the comments, because the comments form another system, which can sometimes be independent of or even irrelevant to the posts. This can be observed in some cases, when commenters began chatting with each other which has nothing to do with the theme highlighted by the blogger.<sup>xiv</sup> For Anti, he treated his blog as his columns. But he doesn't reject interaction and discussion with the commenters. For example, in response to a comment pointing out his error in translating an English article to Chinese, Anti not only responded to the comment and modified the translation immediately, but also wrote another post about what the mistake means.<sup>xv</sup> However, after all, the blogger is on a privileged position to decide whether and when to interact with the readers.

Bloggers in this sense is more like a broadcaster. He sets the agenda for discussion through his post. What constantly happens is that the commenters asking follow-up questions to Anti and trying to make conversation with him. 'Bloggers desire readers, but want controlled interaction.' (Nardi, Schinao & Gumbrecht, 2004) Even if the blogger doesn't select or delete the comments, he is still at the centre of the stage and seize the most control over the blog. The

paradox is whether you agree or disagree with Anti, your visit to his blog itself is a support for the blogger. The clicks on the blog contribute to the influence it has in the cyberspace. 67% readers surveyed read the blog at least once in 2-3 days, among which nearly half (48%) of them read Anti blog at least once every day. This relatively intensive reading behavior of a personal blog shows the sense of loyalty in its readership. As survey showed, the readers scored high in terms of the level of being informative (5.62 for average) and inspiring (5.28 for average) of Anti blog. Not only is blog informative, it is also a carrier of an interesting personality whom people want to know more about. This extra element distinguishes bloggers from an online reporters or columnists, increases interactions and also contributes to the base of the unequal relationship.

### **Among the readers**

Judging from the comments on the blog, the oppositional voices can be as loud as the supporting ones. The discussion among the readers is similar to what generally happens in BBS. Readers can select what to speak in the comments, debate and reason with each other.

Although it is equal in the sense of accessibility, the ability to abstract oneself in public discussion has always been an unequally distributed resource. (Warner, 1993) This once occurred in bourgeois public sphere, where to be white, male, literate and propertied was the precondition of participating rational debates. Here in Anti blog, this also happens, except it happens in the Chinese context and on a virtual sphere.



The survey showed that 20% of the readers are female, while the overall female internet users in China occupy 41.3% of the whole online population (CNNIC, 2006). One of the readers complained that Anti blog failed to attract female readers. Besides, the general education level of the Anti blog readers are well above the average level of the Internet users in China. 95% of them have at least a junior college degree and 86% of them have at least an undergraduate degree, among which nearly 30% have a master or doctoral degree. On the contrary, the result of the latest Internet survey shows the three respective figures are 53.6%, 27.3% and 2.9% (CNNIC, 2006). This shows that the participants and readers of the Anti blog are limited to a rather educationally elites. The political and rational debates of the blog constructed quite a high threshold for the participation.

### **Summary**

The blogosphere is not a place where everyone is equal. Due to the particular format of the blog, the blogger is granted the right to control his blog to a large extent. Since the purpose of Anti blog and most of the j-blogs is to deliver the information and opinions, they won't limit the visits of any readers. But the relationship between the blogger and the readers remains unequal because it is the blogger who set the agenda of the topic for discussion and who provide a leading point of view. The interaction between the blogger and the readers largely depends on the willingness of the blogger. What's more, the high education level of the readers and the overwhelming percentage of male users

also put the matter of openness and equality into doubt. Despite the unequal relationship between the blogger and the readers, readers are still willing to visit the blog due to the need for the alternative information and view points of high quality. There is also a sense of attraction by the personality of the blogger, which is presented through the time and the writings with a strong personality.

#### **4.1.4. The relationship between Anti blog and mass media**

##### **1. The relationship with domestic media**

When Anti started blogging, he hadn't yet become a constant offline media columnist. But after his blog writing gained popularity among its readers, including many journalists and media professionals, his writings can be more often found in print media. He not only started writing columns for news magazines and newspapers, but editorials as well. His impact among the readers also spread from online blogging to offline media. About 37% of the readers started to pay attention to his newspaper columns after they became regular readers of his blog.

However, the difference between writing a blog post and writing a newspaper column is obvious.

*'I wrote an editorial on Taiwan election, but it was rejected by the editor...I wanted to post it on the blog, but it seems impossible. An editorial represents 'us' and is based on consensus, but a blog represents 'me', shining a unique points of view. Thus, a good editorial is one that can make cutting-edge analysis and comments within the limits of mainstream public opinion and political*



*restrictions, while a blog is to speak out thoroughly and clearly. Thus, a rejected exciting editorial can be totally worthless as a blog post.*<sup>xvi</sup>

Anti would post original draft of articles on his blog purposefully. For example, in August 28, 2005, he posted the original editorial he wrote for *Oriental Morning Post*, a Shanghai newspaper, entitled:

*'[Editorial for Oriental Morning Post] New Legislation Gloriously Born in Iraq, US having the responsibility to be an escort*

Below the main title, he added a small line, indicating the published title:

*The published title: Big Nations have the Responsibility to Help Iraq get through the legislative transition.*

In the offline media practice, such words as *gloriously* and *escort* are too positive to describe either the Iraqi legislation or the US. Chinese government's attitude is against the Iraqi war. The profile of a never-too-positive US is also a journalistic principle. This modification of the newspaper editor in the title is just one of the examples of the '*politically correct*' that traditional media have to obey. But the tolerance of online publication is much higher.

Another thing that knit Anti blog with offline media was that the twice shut down of his blog were directly caused by his support for newspapers. The first was *China Youth Daily* and the second was *Xinjingbao*. When these two critical newspapers were faced with political pressure of restructuring and changing their original critical ways of making news, Anti published several articles on his blog, deeply condemning the act of the government. The support for the journalists he

respects and the anger he expressed in *Xinjingbao* incident, cost him of his blogs.

One thing that makes Anti blog and other A-list j-blogs distinct is that they provided information and opinions that can not be found in the main stream media. When asked why they like Anti blog, many readers said that it provides ‘*a non-mainstream comments on Mainland politics*’, it is ‘*bold in expressing political thoughts*’, it provides ‘*the inside facts*’, or it gives him ‘*information that I never knew before*’ and ‘*those information that were suppressed by the CCP*’. When a majority of political information and opinions are controlled and censored in main stream media, to get alternative information from journalists is a good choice for the audience. This gap between the official political information and the private expression of journalists themselves increased the value and attractiveness of Chinese j-blogs.

## **2. The relationship with foreign media**

There was vast foreign news coverage on Anti blog after his Space was banned. Before that, BBC was already quoting Anti’s comments from his blog as a representation of Chinese blogger’s anger towards the sudden organizational change of *Xinjingbao*.<sup>xvii</sup> Others like Reuters and *Asian Weekly* also quoted his sayings as an online voice and source of information from the Mainland. Washington Post even translated the last several posts of Anti Space into English, and posted the whole texts on its website. The western media reports contribute to the huge debates in US and raised the concern of American Internet giants supporting Chinese government suppressing press freedom. This event, together



with some other events, including the Shitao case<sup>xviii</sup>, was heatedly discussed among western media.

Anti works as a researcher for the foreign newspaper New York Times in its Beijing bureau. He tried to hide this off-line identity from the very beginning so that his online writing would not influence his off line work. But since his blog gains too much fame and trouble, he can no longer hide his real identity and this raised trouble for New York Times. The report of Washington Post on Anti's case was a trouble to NYT, because it's difficult for NYT to report on something happened within itself. Anti faced pressure from his boss, who found his blogging affecting NYT. As he said in the interview, *'I am a journalist. I am not supposed to be at the centre of the stage.'* This contributed to part of the reason that he abandoned blogging after the shutdown of Space.

## **Summary**

Wendland (2003) notes that blogging consists of news that is 'not filtered, edited, or delay delivered, as with traditional media'. A blog empowers the writer with greater freedom to provide colorful, subjective, and political commentary than would be possible within the framework of a traditional media outlet. (Lampa, 2006) The value of j-blog as a form of online publishing does lie in its tension with the offline publishing. Especially in China, where journalists, especially social and political journalists, were suppressed to express fully and freely the information they collected. Blogs allow them represent themselves instead of the news organization they work for, keep themselves as an individual,

and at the same time take the advantage of their vast access to information and their writing skills. They are providing alternative information for the readers through blogging, and spreading their personal influence independent of their institutions. But the pressure from the state is still huge in the information age. Using Huang's (1993) metaphor, the state is invading the third realm between state and society. The regulations and suppression from the government both highlighted the significance of the j-blogs, and at the same time risked their existence. Bloggers have to stand out as individuals, which increased their fame and also make them more fragile in front of the state.

#### **4.1.5. The relationship between Anti blog and the other blogs**

The blogosphere is created not by a single blog, but a network of interlinked bloggers and their readers. At the core of the blogosphere lies 'a minority of active and engaged bloggers who post, comment, and link frequently, creating a kernel of conversational community based on personal networks facilitated by blogging tools and associated technologies.' (Lampa, 2006) The 'blogrolling' function enabled a network of blogs interconnected with each other. There were around 80 blogrollings on the side bar of the Anti blog, and they were categorized according to their features and concerns. Most of the links connect to other j-blogs and online writer's blogs. The survey showed that 52.2% of the readers learnt about Anti blog from other bloggers, compared with 18.1% of them who learnt it from BBS forums. The interconnectivity of the blogs created a network through which A-list bloggers were more and more linked by others and



the influence can be spread throughout the blogosphere.

Not only are blogs connected with each other. They will refer to each other in their blogs. In one case, Anti quoted a famous Shanghai blogger Wang Jianshuo in one of his posts. It is about Wang's critics on the biased opinions that BBC and other mainstream western media hold for Chinese Internet development.<sup>xix</sup> Such quotations make blogosphere an online community and a closer relationship between the bloggers. These A-list bloggers can empower each other by inviting more people to visit each other's blogs or simply link to each other or quote each other. Another example is Deutsche Welle International Weblog Awards 2005. Anti was invited to be one of the judges, and he posted an article to ask the readers to recommend Chinese blogs to him.<sup>xx</sup> He later helped illustrating and recommending several Chinese blogs, mostly concerning politics, to other judges in Germany, and another Chinese j-blog *Massage Cream* successfully won the award. This kind of close relationship between bloggers from online to offline is evidence showing that blogosphere has the potential of empowering individual bloggers in a more personal and individual level, as opposed to BBS, where groups of people are empowered collectively. By linking to those who one respects and who share the same quality and points, the bloggers communicate with each other. At the same time, debates occur in the blogosphere, when bloggers quoting each other and try to It might not be as intense an interaction as on BBS or through instant messages, but it is a way of grouping and attracting people to each other's blogs.

Among the 84 journalist readers of Anti blog who were surveyed, 86% of them have their own blogs, and half of them cover political issues in their blogs. One of the journalist bloggers told me that many of his journalist friends have their own blogs and it is now a way of sharing the information among them. Since the mainstream coverage is highly controlled, some of the journalists use blogs as a place to publish information and express their own views. It is also seen as an alternative way of preserving the facts that can not be preserved through traditional media.

Some of the articles on Anti blog are merely about weekend activities among journalist friends. These articles are not relevant to any political or social issues, but just about the life of journalists. They surely do not belong to the impersonal, political and rational discourses. The boundary between public and private seems quite blurred, because there are differences between journalists as a public role and journalists as private friends. This function is quite popular in Chinese j-blogs. J-bloggers are willing to discuss public issues and news information, but they will also talk about personal life, especially stories of other people in the journalists circle. They use it not just for political purpose but for social function as well. Just as what a reader said, 'journalists are a special group of people, and I am interested to know not only the information and opinions they can provide, but also their ways of life. Their life is also full of information.' By doing so, j-bloggers interact with each other and form a larger j-blogsphere. By sharing information and even make jokes with each other, they are forming



their group identity. Reports and columns on the traditional media hide their real characters and personal thoughts, but through blogging, their private sides can be shown, and this makes them more human and true.

## **Summary**

The blogrolling function technically helped knitting a network of j-blogs. If we put Anti blog into the bigger context of the Chinese j-blogsphere, we will find the whole network involves more debates and interactions. There are more power centers instead of a single dominated power center as we see within Anti blog. They also presented themselves vividly and private sides of life within the journalists circle were presented through this interaction. The fact that blogs are personalized space that belongs to individuals and reflects individuals makes it possible to function in both public and private sphere.

### **4.1.6. The relationship between Anti blog and the state power**

*'China's fast-growing legions of bloggers know they must avoid taboo keywords, including those programmed into the Chinese version of MSN Spaces. If you enter any of those, the postings will not be shown or your attempt to set up a blog will be denied.'* (Economist, 2006)

By the end of 2005, Chinese internet users have reached an unprecedented 111 million, next only to U.S (CNNIC, 2006). However, the development of Internet in China has never been a simple technological or commercial issue. Not only is the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) hailing the vast commercial potential of Internet, but it is also exerting state control over the Chinese Web

and its use. The party implemented a 'three-part strategy' to maintain the authoritarian regime in a network society by 'providing economic growth and some personal freedom, managing the Internet risks, and harnessing its potential'. (Hachigian, 2001) China has restructured its regulatory institutions regarding its Internet policy and the Internet regulation has evolved into a highly coordinated and balanced structure. (Tan, 1999) China's government is both famous for its great support for the construction of Internet facilities as well as the notorious Great Firewall, which functions to filter and block the flow of information for the sake of the stable regime of the party.

The Internet control has been enhanced since late 1990s, after the anti-American nationalistic movement. Some significant issues have happened later on, symbolized by the shutdown of the biggest university BBS system in China, *Yitahutu*. Since 1996, the Chinese government has enacted a number of highly restrictive laws prohibiting publishing political commentary the government considers undesirable, and there have been continuing reports of various foreign media and human rights Web sites being blocked.

It is against this context that Anti's blog was blocked twice by the government. In August 17<sup>th</sup> 2005, Anti and his friends found his blog inaccessible from inside the country, but it remained accessible from abroad. Blog-city, a blog service provider based in Scotland, was blocked by the Chinese government. Although there is no direct evidence showing that it is Anti alone that caused the strong reaction from the government, he was definitely one of the



most influential Chinese political writers in this blog site. Annoyed by the blunt interruption of the government, Anti posted an article on blog-city through a proxy claiming that '*although the information Great Wall of China prohibited the Chinese to see the outside world, it will end up building a coffin of its own.*'<sup>xxi</sup> In this same post, he recommended his domestic blog mirror for the reference. This blog mirror at MSN Spaces later became the new Anti blog and the blog-city one was not used again until Anti Space was destroyed by MSN half a year later.

The period of Anti Space saw a vast growth in its popularity. Although Microsoft has already made the policy of deleting any sensitive words in the titles of the posts, Anti could easily avoid that by adding hyphens between such words as *Min-zhu* (democracy). In August 2005, Anti blog-city enjoyed a daily visit of 7000. The figure increased to 15000 in December before it was destroyed. Although both the readers and Anti himself knew the risk<sup>xxii</sup>, Anti still tried a second time. During the interview, he admitted that he should have backed up all the data at the end of December, when some of his friend's blogs were shut down. But he failed to do so. Microsoft, just like Yahoo and Google, submitted to the pressure from the Chinese government. And this time, by destroying the particular blogs, the company does not suffer from an overall loss of the market in China as Blog-city and Blogspot once did. This cooperation between the government and the capital shows that the Chinese public sphere is under a double threat.

In western society, power interests prefer an unregulated Internet, which can

be steered by capital, but on the other hand, they want this space to be relatively secure. In China, such j-bloggers as Anti, who see blog as a source to make up what is not allowed in off-line journalistic practice are faced with the challenge from the government. In the case of Anti blog, we can find that on one hand, Microsoft is empowering the j-blogger to publish the information and opinions that was impossible in off-line journalistic practice, and especially effective in creating the individual journalist's personal influence in a way much better than BBS, but on the other hand, they will sell off these bloggers under the pressure. In this sense, whether it being a domestic capital or foreign capital makes no difference. Anti selected MSN Spaces among other blog service providers because he believed that an American company would obey basic morality including freedom of expression. But it turned out to be not the case. Sometimes when he hasn't been writing on the blog for a certain period of time, some readers expressed their worry about him. He has been visited by the National security police for several times and the blog was truly closed; even it's an American company who owns it.

It is believed that rational talk is possible only when people may speak 'openly' without fear of sanctions. (Gouldner,1976) The stability of modern governments is especially dependent on 'opinion'. For Habermas, the public means community and citizenship, as distinct both from state sovereignty on the one side and from the economy on the other. The emergence of the blogosphere distinguished and created a group of individual A-list bloggers, including



j-bloggers, but this personalized public sphere seems to be even more fragile than BBS. On one hand, the personalization trend in blogosphere shows this particular public sphere is becoming more fragmented, and the power more de-centered. In BBS, a group of people come together and form a community through communication, but in blogosphere, individual bloggers seem to create their own powers. Nevertheless, they are not isolated points, but are interwoven. It is a community embodied with communicative power. Rebecca, one of the most famous bloggers and Internet critics in US, not only introduced Anti blog in her own blog, but also expressed her support when Anti blog was shut down.<sup>xxiii</sup> After the data of Anti Space was lost, Microsoft approached Anti, and sent a disc of data to Rebecca. She later sent the disc to Anti by mail. This was the safest way to reach Anti.

### **Summary**

Technologies alone are not able to fulfill the potential of being enormous leverage to citizens. In the past, big power and big money was always able to find ways to control access to virtual communities and control new communications media when they emerged. (Rheingold, 1993) The market and the public sphere in the media present very different profiles: the former robust, expansive, and ideologically ascendant; while the latter frail, diminutive, and on the defensive. (Dahlgren, 2001) The comprehensive interdependencies of the market routinely transcend the boundaries of these jurisdictions.

As Wang Hui (2003) has put it, it is almost impossible to establish the

binary of socialism/capitalism in China today, because the state is becoming a political structure that establishes market mechanism. The development of Internet in China reflected this mechanism of state and market power. The development of the Internet technology both created the ways of the online political expression for Chinese journalists, but the blogosphere is not independent from state and power. Microsoft applies nation-based law system in the infrastructure for its MSN Spaces service and blog-city can not help but be blocked by the Chinese government. However the personalized character of the blogosphere combined individual bloggers together and they are able to form a blogosphere across the border.

### **Conclusion for Research Question 1**

Anti blog can be seen as a subaltern public sphere which is part of the bigger Chinese j-blogosphere. If we put Anti blog in a larger context, it is related with other blogs through interlink and inter-reference. The similar j-blogs and political blogs combined together into a larger blogosphere. These are both links of community but also links of individual bloggers. But it is a relatively loose community compared with BBS, while the personal characters of the blog are very much stronger.

The personalized feature of the blog means that journalists are using their blogs as an alternative channel of publishing, not just as a journalist, but also as a human being. Anti's online publishing is both rational and sensational. He uses both the power of reason and the power of emotion. His arguments are not only



logical, but also with a personal concern. At the same time, he has more control over his blog. The readers, by leaving their comments, are more equal when they discuss with each other, but within the blog, it is still Anti who are setting the agendas of the topics and have the most prestigious advantage to dominate the opinions.

Anti blog is not independent of either offline media or state power. It gains its resources from offline journalistic job, and it realizes its value by providing the information neglected or not allowed to be published in the mainstream media.

However, merely judging Anti blog as a alternative public sphere is far from enough. The distance of blog to the ideal type of public sphere lies also in its personalized characters, especially the identity construction activities behind the blogging activities. J-bloggers not only combine facts with opinions, they also use facts to serve their opinions. These opinions and attitudes are combined to build up their online personality. This will lead us to a closer understanding of how to understand online public sphere and rethink the relationship between public and private.

## 4.2 Identity and authority construction of Anti blog

### 4.2.1. Who is Anti?

Before moving forward to the identity construction part, let me depict Anti using the basic facts I collected and the interviews that I conducted.

Anti was born in the suburb of Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, in 1975. The city

of Nanjing, where he grew up and finished his college, used to be the nation's capital during the era of Republican China. His real name was Zhao Jing. In Chinese, Jing means quietness, and is most popularly used in girls' names. This brought him much trouble throughout his childhood and youth hood, when peer boys would make fun of him of being girlish. He regards his real name bringing him too much negative effects and humiliation. He entered a small college and graduated with a college degree in automatic engineering and started his career first as a salesman. He took up his first job in media industry in 2001, when he started working for *Huaxia Times* as a commenter. That was three years after he first joined the online BBS Forums, and later became a famous figure in BBS and an Internet activist. In 2002, he changed his job to *21 Century Global Report*, a then newly established newspaper in Guangzhou, and worked as a journalist. The booming growth of this newspaper didn't last long when it was finally shut down by the Chinese government for critical reports in 2003. He moved to New York Times Beijing Bureau and since then worked there as a researcher till now. He started using net name of Anti since he participated in BBS discussions, and he used the same name as a blogger. He first heard about blogging from his journalist friends in early 2004. In the last month of 2004, he opened his own blog. He blogged for one year and gained huge popularity among the audience. He abandoned blogging in December, 2005, when his blog in MSN Space was shut down by the government.

#### **4.2.2. Identity construction of Anti blog**



The chronicle sequence of the blog makes it possible for one to construct his identity through a time line. In recalling his online experience, Anti said that even you have made your name in BBS, someone would drag out one of your posts years ago and ask you why you had said that before. *'It can be really awkward because I want to develop myself through the years on the Internet and construct my online personality.'* This kind of anti-chronicle act would confuse others as well as yourself and make your intention of personality construction very difficult. On the other hand, there are so many people on the forum and this also increased the difficulties for your voice to be heard. By reviewing his past several years of online communication and offline journalistic experience, Anti made the following comments:

*'It took four years for people to know me through BBS. Later, after I became a journalist, people still didn't really know me, because the media hides you. You are talking about facts. You are not a person. But through blogging, half a year is enough for you to be known by others.'*

The archives and permalinks on the blog enable readers to track back what the blogger had written in the past more easily. The calendar shows the date when the blogger posted an entry. The RSS function provides a much convenient way for people who use news aggregators to subscribe to the blog and follow up with the latest updates. Besides, the blogger can make modification on the previous posts. All these functions offer bloggers a more powerful and controllable way of constructing his personality through blogging.

In traditional media writings, journalists are supposed to conceal the existence of their subjectivity, and present the mere facts and analysis as objective and balanced as possible. By contrast, there is a strong sense of embodiment in j-blog writing. As a reader, you can never neglect that it is Anti, the blogger, who is speaking consistently across the time, because it is both an open space and a personal space. The distinct authorship is the base of identity construction.

The word *I* is frequently mentioned in Anti blog. Except for those articles that were quoted from other's writings, almost all the original posts embodied the personal opinions, personal experiences as well as personal emotions of the author. As Anti said, '*The Internet provides me with huge resources, and it is also regulating my future... This is a world that amplifies everybody's drawbacks: you are only becoming more yourself.*'<sup>xxiv</sup> The consistent development through the one year blogging profiled the personality and identity of Anti as follows:

1. **A Newsman:** Anti emphasizes his journalist professional from the very beginning. But he calls himself more often as newsman rather than a journalist. He mentioned his past experience as a journalist in the newspaper and his experience in Iraq and Taiwan. He wrote *New Newsman Journalistic Bulletin*, sharing his experience of how to make news and get news sources from foreign news channels, as well as how to improve the level of journalistic English. His identity and experience as a newsman



granted him knowledge and authority of his words. *'What I learnt since I became a journalist is to shut up. The journalist himself should not add any judgments, but should present the originality of the facts.'* *'When I was collecting information, I entered a state of being a newsman. I treated myself as a piece of white paper and give up all the previous value judgments and previous knowledge. I believe the readers should trust my information arrangements.'*<sup>xxv</sup>

2. **A Liberalist:** Liberalism is a dominant ideology of Anti blog. He never hesitates to point out this political ideology that he upholds tightly throughout his writings and analysis. This liberalist identity is very important, both in advocating media freedom (*'If we ask what China lacks, it is media freedom.'*<sup>xxvi</sup>), but also in his debate with the neo-leftists.
3. **A Christian:** Although religion is a sensitive topic in China, Anti reveals his belief in Christianity in his blog and constantly mentions it in his posts. He said he has no choice but to 'walk towards religion' after his grandpa was dead.<sup>xxvii</sup> When his blog in blog-city was blocked, he said *'I am an angry Christian. All you have done today will transfer into my determination.'*<sup>xxviii</sup> He claimed that *'I am not a pure liberalist. Although I tried to separate personal belief from public affairs, the bottom line of*

*religion still push me to pick up a more conserved point of view in public issues.*<sup>xxix</sup>

4. **Pro-democracy:** Democracy does not only appear in political issues, but also a hidden agenda in all sorts of issues. Take his posts on *Super Girl*, a Chinese entertainment program for example. Anti's comments on *Super Girl* helped his blog get popularized. He made connection between women selecting their favorite singers and men searching for Chinese democracy. '*Super girl is surely not democracy, but it is the illusion of Chinese people of democracy. Let part of the women democratized, and we males should swear to make China a real democratic country in our life.*'
5. **Professionalism:** Anti believes that professionalism should be promoted in Chinese journalistic practices. This is the major reason that he wrote the *New Newsman Journalistic Bulletin*, and put it on the Internet. He promoted this professionalism through comments and discussion on Chinese and western media coverage. By writing a series of posts on the event of Guardian Newspaper foreign correspondent Benjamin, who risks entering a village and resulted in the injury of his Chinese guide, he criticized that Benjamin neglect media professionalism. '*If true and professional reports cannot be made, then how can the responsibilities be*



taken?’ He also admitted that besides the media professionalism, his furious criticism on Guardian has a lot to do with his democratic political stance. *‘The democratic party can not stand the loss of credibility.’*<sup>xxx</sup>

6. **An Idealist:** There is a distance between the ideals of democracy, media professionalism, press and religious freedom and the reality in China. Anti sees himself as an idealist who advocates these ideas in the hope of creating a future. For example, his last post in Anti Space was entitled *‘Show my respect to the idealists, and tolerate the realistic choices’*. He praised those idealists who did not submit to the reality as fulfilled the historical tasks and those who did, has missed the history.<sup>xxxi</sup>

During the interview, Anti admitted that he has been purposefully constructing his online personality through all these years, and he found blogging the best way to do so. With the real name Jing, which means ‘quietness’ in Chinese and is generally used in a girl’s name, he has been struggling to get rid of the negative influence it has brought to him since his student years.

*‘I am a smart leader, but when other boys make fun of me, I feel deeply humiliated. I always seem to be shilly-shally and with an Oedipus Complex. I want to make a change. And I started by using my new name Anti. When I started to build my own kingdom online, I became the King of myself. The name Anti concealed my true personality and also changed my personality.’*

Anti got independent of his born identity, and moved towards his new identity through online practice. He manipulated his online identity to make sure that he can get a freer personality with as little control from the online sphere as possible, as himself put it:

*'I also talked about pretty girls. It seems as if Anti loves pretty girls. I just made this impression online because I don't want to be controlled by my online personality. I don't want to make myself a hero and to meet the expectations of the readers. I want to get rid of some of the worship that some readers might have on me. So I sometimes exaggerated myself, so that the readers will then regard me as a normal person, one who loves girls and makes small mistakes.'*

Although more than 80% of the bloggers do not know him in person, they are all depicting him in their minds. One of the readers said that he is not satisfied with Anti's writing but he is still interested in reading his blog because he is curious about Anti's life and personality. When asked about their likes and dislikes of Anti blog, many talked about their likes and dislikes about Anti as they see him, such as his extremeness, his passion, his braveness and others. It is almost impossible to separate a blog with the blogger, and to make clear what is public, and what is personal.

#### **4.2.3. The Construction of Authority**

Studies have been done to help setting up criteria and ways of establishing and recognizing authority online. Fritch and Cromwell (2001) listed several elements in their model, including format and presentation, identity and reputation of



author, identity and reputation of institution, as well as identity and reputation of affiliations. Judging from this model, there are close relationships between identity and authority. Their research shows that confidence increases over time due to increased knowledge of authorship and affiliation.

The authority construction process in Anti blog is accompanied with the identity construction. As a newsman, who has rich experience in Iraq and Taiwan, who used to work for a distinguished though short-lived newspaper, who openly advocates his liberalist and democratic political opinions with a rational, confident, as well as emotional deliberation, his reputation is well established among the readers. Although he for most of the time hid his current institution, New York Times, he has consistently reemphasized his personality throughout the writings. Although he doesn't always respond to most of the comments and feedbacks, he is changing his personal blogosphere into a more and more public one. He admitted that by the end of December 2005, it has been very difficult for him to talk about his cat and other private affairs in his blog, because some of the readers are quoting each of his articles and this gave him pressure to limit his writings within political affairs. The demand of Anti blog is also a reflection of his authority and influence. The figure of Anti as an opinion leader with flesh and blood, together with his being quoted by national and international media, increased his online reputation and authority.

With a strong personality that conveyed through his words, readers learn information and his opinions by digesting his words, and at the same time, they

are getting to know his personal characters gradually. The chronicle feature makes reading blogs a developmental process, and it allow the ties between the blogger and the readers grow. When Anti blog-city was blocked, 76% of the readers followed him to the new Space within a month. Even when Anti Space was shut down, nearly 70% of the readers continue reading his posts on blog-city by using proxies or RSS subscription. This won't happen if his blog is not enjoyed by the readers or if his authority as an online personal publisher is not recognized.

Another example that shows his influence happens when his blogs were shut down. Very sentimental expressions followed these events and some readers went sympathetic to Anti and angry about the government. Although there used to be agrees and disagrees among them, they were on his side when the freedom of expression was violated. In the open questions of the survey, many readers expressed their likes and dislikes of Anti blog, more about Anti instead of the blog itself. For them, this blog is not merely an online sphere but a virtual Anti, a human being. They use such word as passion, brave, deep and sentimental to describe the blog, while in fact they are describing Anti.

### **Conclusion for Research Question 2**

As David Sifry (2006), the founder and CEO of the biggest blog searching engine Technorati has said, blog becomes a shard of one's identity. There is a deeper level of accountability compared with postings on BBS or chat rooms, because you are the only person who can write in your blog and people can trace



your writings through the history. Both in the link inside the blogs and through Technorati, you know who is talking about you. The format of blog enables the blogger to construct his identity in a controllable and consistent way. Through one year of blogging, Anti made himself an influential online figure, with unique personal characters and clear political stance. He constructed his identity, control the profile of his online personality, and at some degree influenced by this personality. His online authority was also established through the process of identity construction and political deliberation. These two processes were mutually enhanced through this personalized public sphere, where public can get access to the alternative information and opinions from a virtual space.

#### 4.3. The Personalization of j-blog: empowerment and its discontent

The media could be regarded as a multi-vocal discursive forum where social relations and identities are continuously negotiated, reformulated and contested. We should consider the question of 'how it produces social relations by giving turns to speak and how the social identities and capacities for action are constructed in these contested processes of representation.' (Koivisto & Valiverronen, 1996) In the blogosphere, the feature of personalization means that the bloggers as individuals stand out from the mass others. They can well control their blogs and connect to other blogs to form a bigger blogosphere. The personalized blogs can not fully qualify as an ideal public sphere, where people deliberately communicate equally, freely and rationally. The degree of equality and freedom depends on how the blogger control and organize the blog, and the

willingness of his participating in discussion and debates. It empowers the journalists by establishing the connection with other bloggers and their authority among the readers, as well as their reputation among traditional media. This empowerment can be realized at a low cost of time and money. At the same time, the readers can gain alternative information and opinions in this process and share their comments with the blogger and each other.

The identity construction of Anti shows that j-blog enables a sense of embodiment in stead of a status of impersonal as some cyber hyperrealists inferred, and the authority has to be established on this embodiment. In Western countries, this is regarded as a challenge to traditional professionalism and ways of writing news (Robinson, 2006). The popularity of j-blogs is because 'they allow the reader to see the journalist as a human being, connecting with them without the stiff, imperial voice that turns so many young people off.' (Pohlig, 2003) It is also true in China, except that the strong interference of the state and market power into the public sphere makes personalization a strategy of j-bloggers to reveal social facts and judgments.



Chapter 5 Discussion: Internet, public sphere and identity construction

Now that the advantages and limitations of blog in serving public discussion in contemporary China has been shown in the case of Anti blog, one major question still remain unanswered: Why people frequently fail to meet the standard of the ideal ‘rational-critical discourse’?

To echo this question, we have to bring back the ideas of Goffman into our discussion. While we are applying the classical ideal of public sphere in analyzing the virtual communities or online activities, we should not forget his social theory of identity construction. A better way of understanding blogging and other online activities should include a combination of both Habermasian rational-critical public discourse, and the identity formation and expression.

Summarizing the views of Fraser (1992), Weintraub (1997), Calhoun (1997) and Wolfe (1997), I listed a comparison between the arguments of Habermas and Goffman:

| Public Sphere (Habermas)                  | Identity Politics (Goffman)            |
|---|--|
| Rational-critical discourse               | Identity formation                     |
| Rationality                               | Desire and Affection (Fraser)          |
| Public life as collective decision making | Public life as sociability (Weintraub) |
| Singleness                                | Multiple and alternative identity      |
| Centered                                  | Decentralized (Calhoun)                |

What makes Anti blog an interesting case to study is that personal identity seem to be especially distinct within the blogosphere, when blogging serves as both a space for public deliberative communication and personal identity construction.

There are two fundamental distinctions between 'private' and public: first, what is hidden and withdrawn vs. what is open, revealed and accessible; second, what is individual vs. what is collective, or affects the interests of a collectivity of individuals. (Weintraub, 1997) The heart of 'public' life is a process of active participation in collective decision making, carried out within a framework of fundamental solidarity and equality.

Both views of Habermas and Goffman are essential to the way we live now. But Habermas' ideal type of public sphere hasn't taken identity formation into consideration, thus lose the aspects of people's humanity, their private life, which is also their base of public presentation. In the case of Anti blog, his blog writing is different from his news and editorial writing not only in that he writes more freely and covering more sensitive topics that is not allowed in offline writing, but also because he talked from a personal point of view and embodied himself, his personal experience and characters in the process of blogging. His arguments are rational and logical, combined with abundant knowledge and information to support his elaboration, but he also express emotionally. The line between public and private are perpetually shifting. We can not deny his personal and sensational touch and accuse it as being untrue or irrational.



Public sphere invokes 'identity', but it does so with more emphasis on actions and their consequences than on the nature or characteristics of the actors. (Robbins, 1993) This part of concern should be further raised in our study of online communication. Communicative action aims for mutual understanding, trust, and shared knowledge (Fornas, 1995), and this purpose cannot be only reached by rational-critical discourse. There is something other than this that is also very important in the online public sphere. The identity and authority have to be constructed because a blogger or any person who speak online should possess his consistent reputation based on his online personality. This identity and personality are to be constructed through both his ability of rational-critical discourse and his emotional and personal dispositions. The communication has to be both rational and emotional, just like the blogger is both a public online activist, but also an offline private person. He has his past, his present, and his idea of the future. With this embodiment, the online personality can be fulfilled and the bridge between public and private can be built.

Even in such a political news j-blog as Anti's, the public sphere is not only dealing with the hard news and politics, but also personal activities and feelings. It is a platform for identity and authority formation, social capital accumulation, as well as opinion competition. Even a technologically mediated publicness need not bracket desire and affection. (Fraser, 1992) Instead, it can be a means of stimulating and sustaining them, in the process of nurturing a sense of alternative identity. Anti stood out among the j-blogsphere, but the personalized feature of

his blog is not unique in online communication. The pursuit and formation of an online embodied identity, a reputation and even an authority is an inseparable dimension of the politics of public sphere.

### 5.1. Private Interest vs. Public Interest

Habermas emphasized on the disinterested rational-critical public discourse to be contributed to the communicative action in the public sphere, and he regards the re-feudalization of the public sphere as the result of the growth of organized interest groups. But is it possible that each individual rise from their private sphere totally as a disinterested actor in public discourse?

First of all, are there universal interests? Not only do political and corporate actors make willed interventions in what they see as their calculated interests, but this system of interventions is underpinned by systems of information gathering, assessment, and communication. (Garnham, 1992) In Anti's case, the blog has constantly been faced with pressure from the government control, especially when such corporations as Microsoft joined the government in this not-so-free market economy and censored market place of ideas. The state has its own interest, which is defined by the central government, which sees the stability of society and the regime of high priority and can be in a way realized through controlling the flow of information. The state is out of the public sphere in Habermas' sense. So it is with the corporations such as Microsoft, whose realization of economic interest is based on the recognition of the state government.



Further more, there is no universal interest among the individuals who participate in political discourses in a public sphere. The experience in public sphere is also a source of personal identification. For Anti, the usage of his blog serves for his particular interest of making his voice known in a most efficient way. Although it also turned out to be an alternative information channel for the audiences, the extent that the audience can make use of the blog is very limited. The highly educated character of the audience and the limited willingness of their leaving comments show that the interest of audience does not always lie in line with Anti's. A blog can not fulfill the task of being truly open to everyone, when it set up a taste and criteria of basic literal skills. Also, the experience and identity of the blogger is much more distinct and privileged than all the rest of participants. It is unavoidable that bloggers put their own interest in their writings, whether it is to gain a certain reputation, accumulating social and cultural capital, or even simply make an argument that can firmly support his political beliefs.

## 5.2. Need for Sociability vs. Production of Consensus

In Habermas' ideal, 'Public debate was supposed to transform *voluntas* into a *ratio* that in the public competition of private arguments came into being as the consensus about what was practically necessary in the interest of all' (Habermas, 1989) Except that this 'interest of all' turned out to be different interests of different groups as shown in Anti's case, another critics of his theory is his model of communicative action neglects all those other forms of communicative action

not directed toward consensus, especially when faced by distorted communication. (Garnham, 1992) Mediated communication can be such a channel of distorted communication, because access to both channel and means depends upon the mobilization of scarce material resources and the structures of economic and political power.

Take j-blog as an example. The blogrolling function connects different j-blogs together and builds up conversation between these j-blogs or other internet activists who have an interest in news and politics. As one of the journalists said, blogging does provide more information as well as connection between journalists. The social events posted in Anti's blog serve as a group information center, which is actually organized by him. People link to each other because they appreciate each other's writings and arguments, and they want to build up a certain kind of new relationship which is different from either face-to-face communicative activities, or other means of online communications such as BBS or Instant Message. However, the relationship between bloggers is part of social connection and a way to accumulate social capital. This falls into what Weintraub (1997) called sociability, which, in his sense, is an alternative vision of public life.

We can find this need for sociability in the way Anti and his audiences make use of the blogosphere. Those who didn't know him before reading his blog, started to pay attention to his offline writings. For those who read his blogs and enjoyed the information and opinions he provided, only a small proportion



of them would bother to leave comments and join discussions. Even for those who played an active part in discussion, they are not always carrying this purpose of reaching consensus on certain issues, but are constantly in a process of negotiation. These activities are at the border of private and public. In most of the time, people are conducting conversations and debates not for reaching a public consensus, but to expand the territory of *working consensus* as suggested by Goffman. Working consensus is what people agree on the identities they are both going to play in an interaction. In a blog discussion, the more you are involved, the more you understand each other's social position and political belief. This increasing understanding of each other's identities settles down the base of further discussion, nevertheless, it does not necessarily lead to the formation of public consensus.

### 5.3. Personal Voice vs. Public Opinion

The concept of public opinion has been developed to be distinct from 'mere opinion' by series of intellectuals. Public opinion is seen as a reasoned form of access to truth, and it refers to the views held by those who join in rational-critical debate on an issue. (Calhoun, 1992) It is one of the major criteria to judge whether a certain public discourse can be regarded as public opinion. However, in terms of online political discussion, it has always been an obvious problem to meet with the criteria.

First, when individual people stand out for themselves from the private sphere into the public sphere, he is already in a process of self production. This

process involves self performance. It is obvious in the case of j-blogsphere, where bloggers can not avoid their personal features while deliberating public issues through the time line. Not only did Anti use various sensational ways to express his humanitarian concerns together with rational analysis, the audience who left comments also tried to be persuasive by using jokes and exaggerated metaphors.

Secondly, when personal voices come together to form public opinions, the voices has strong connection with personal experience. One cannot guarantee to be always rational, not only because to be rational needs certain intellectual abilities and resources, but that rationality alone can not help to fully illustrate their points. Besides, personal voice is always motivated by personal interests, which also shed shadow on a critical-rational discourse.

#### 5.4. Self Identity vs. Collective Identity

All public discourses are occasions for identity-formation, and experience is in part constituted through public discourse, and at the same time continually orients people differently in public life. (Negt and Kluge, 1993) In blogosphere, which contains practices and discourses that are neither fully public, nor fully private, such publics who joined the discussion are not authoritative for the entire society, but they allow the individual members within the group to develop their personal identities. (Wolfe, 1997) On the other hand, blog can be seen as an extension of what Goffman calls 'territories of self'. It contains both the physical space over which the person can command (which is the blogger's personal



cyber space), and the rights and privacy and the claims on social space that a person is entitled to make (including the rights the blogger owns to publish his posts and delete the comments, etc.)

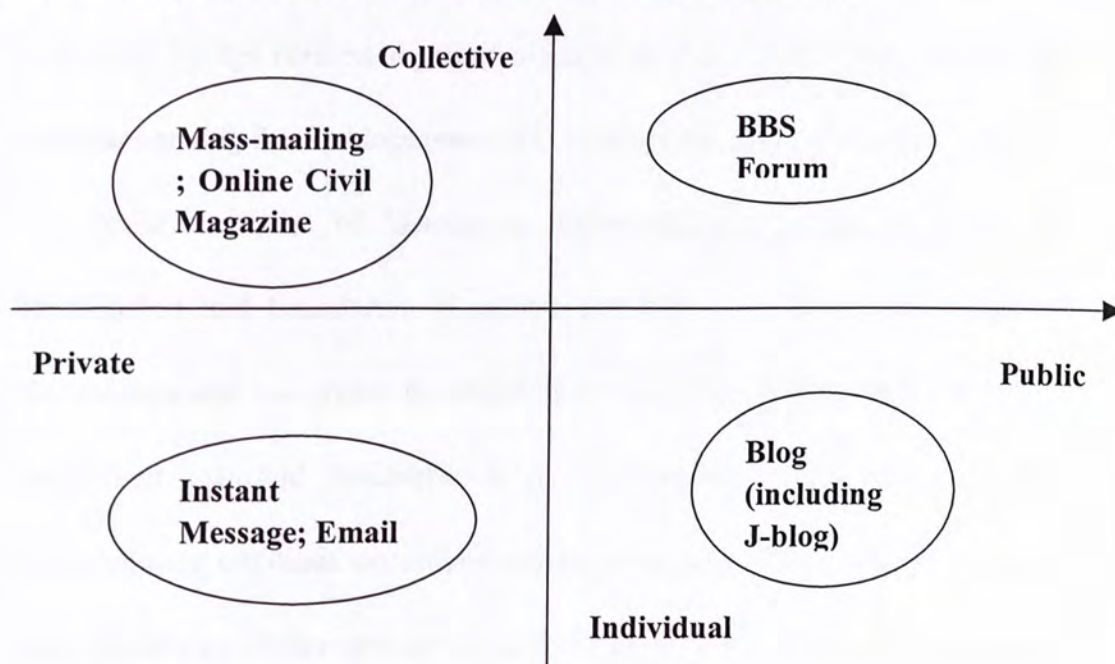
Blogosphere is a space where the blogger is most privileged to construct his public identity with his private mind. Goffman suggests that there are several ways one may use to construct his identity. First, he will do *impression management* by performing and projecting one's intentions and desires. Second, he will try to present himself in a favorable light and *idealize* his image in front of the public. These processes are not something shameful, but natural in daily life. In cyber space, they are more frequently applied because the distance between an internet ID and the identity behind that ID is much further than face-to-face interaction, and this provide more space for self-production.

The techniques that Anti used in constructing his image through blogging can well fill into the categories that Goffman identified in his Dramatic realization of self. The manipulative aspects of social life have been highlighted in blogosphere. Anti did not deny his eagerness to control his self-production through discourse and reconstruct himself by using words that might not accurately express his ideas. He admitted that while he was writing about the Super Girls, a nation-wide singing contest, he exaggerated his love towards girls. He just wanted to make up his image as a man who is interested in females to make himself look more ordinary a person, instead of an idol to be adored. He also idealized his image by depicting the humanitarian side of him. He wanted to

present himself as a masculine man of political wisdom, with an ordinary love and hatred.

However the image the blogger constructs is not decided by the blogger himself. The identity negotiation process is always on the way. If we look into one individual blog like Anti blog, the readers concentration would later be more and more focused on what kind of person Anti is. It is difficult to tell the difference between Anti and Anti blog. That's why when asked their impression of Anti blog, the audience would straight forwardly express their feeling of Anti.

### 5.5. J-Blogosphere and the Empowerment of Journalists



#### Different Types of Online Means of Communication

If we locate the j-blogosphere in the above graph, we may find that among all the means of online communication, it locates in the sphere, which involve both public discussion and individual publishing. The significance of j-blog is not that how unique its format is as opposed to other forms of communication,



since each format has its uniqueness compared with others, but that in blogosphere, the personal involvement in a political discussion took an utterly extreme format of identity construction, which privileges the blogger much more than the rest of the participants.

The handicapped side of the blogosphere, including its lack of equality between blogger and audience, its not-always-rational-critical discourse, and its preference for the empowerment of those educational elite and those who already gain much information and social resource, is also not unique in blogosphere. However, if we see j-blogosphere in a higher scale, where individual j-blogs connect together to form another virtual public sphere, the dialogues among these j-blogs turn out to be more equal and powerful.

While the issue of 'democratic inclusiveness' is clearly a matter of stratification and boundaries, it is also a matter of how the public sphere incorporates and recognizes the diversity of identities which people bring to it from their manifold involvements in civil society. (Calhoun, 1997) The overwhelming emphasis on rational-critical discourse can narrow the meaning and significance of plurality. In the case of Chinese j-blogs, we see the potential of personalized cyber sphere as a public sphere. The public discourse does not take away the personal characters and multiplicities of identities. Different voices speak out, not as merely rational-critical discourses, but with strong embodied identities and humanity.

This strong embodiment helped to build the bridge between Chinese

journalists and their audiences. Chinese journalists, who used to live in the shadow behind the reports they wrote, now have the chance to stand out and face the audience outside the mainstream. Blogosphere provides them a platform to show their alternative characters and also serves as a channel to deliver the information that cannot be circulated in off-line media. Besides, the recognition among the journalists, whether they know each other or not, has been increased. J-blogging has largely empowered the journalists in terms of their self-identity and self-character. This is extremely important in China, because media reform needs support and echo from the audience. Now, a more positive and vivid image of Chinese journalists emerged in cyberspace, among the chaotic online discourse in BBS forums. The collective identity of j-bloggers is in the process of making when individual j-bloggers claim their rights to publish on their own. Mere rational-critical discourse can not fulfill the task of empowering the journalists in Chinese public sphere, only when journalists construct their identities through both self-production and opinion-production, can the group be empowered with the recognition from the audience. Although Anti was forced to abandon blogging, the booming in Chinese j-blogsphere and the struggling of Chinese journalists inside and outside the authoritarian system, is still on its way.



## Appendix

### 安替博客使用者调查问卷

由于众所周知的原因，安替博客（Space）已经被封。所以麻烦您仔细回忆一下您当初使用安替博客的基本情况。多谢！所有资料将保密，并仅限于本研究使用。

#### I

1. 我得知安替博客的途径是：BBS 论坛，其他博客的链接，朋友的推荐，其他途径。
2. 我阅读安替博客的时间为：一年以上，半年到一年，半年以内。
3. 我上安替博客的频率大约是：数周一次//一周一次//4—6 天一次//2—3 天一次//1 天一次//1 天 2 次//一天 3 次或以上
4. 我阅读安替博客的方式是：逐句阅读，扫描式阅读，只看标题和文章大概。

#### II

5. 安替博客的政治性（由弱到强）：1234567
6. 安替博客的文学性（由弱到强）：1234567
7. 安替博客的严肃性（由弱到强）1234567
8. 安替博客的信息性（由弱到强）1234567
9. 安替博客的启发性（由弱到强）1234567
10. 安替博客的个人风格（由弱到强）1234567
11. 安替博客的开放度，即是否有各种声音在博客上表达（由弱到强）：1234567
12. 安替博客的理性程度（由弱到强）
13. 安替博客的感性程度（由弱到强）

#### III

14. 对于安替博客上的留言，我：一定会看；经常看；偶尔看；很少看；从来不看。
15. 我认为安替博客的留言质量（从低到高）1234567
16. 我在安替博客上留言的条数大约：从来没有，10 条以下，11—49 条，50—100 条，100 条以上
17. 我认为参与安替博客留言讨论的难度（从低到高）：1234567

#### IV

18. 在安替博客时，您是否曾用代理服务器阅读安替在 blog-city 上的博客：是，且经常；偶尔为之；从来没有。
- 19.
20. 您是否拥有自己的博客？有，没有
21. 如果有，您自己的博客中政治性文章的比例为多少？大部分，一半，小部分，几乎没有。
22. 我同安替本人的关系是：很好的朋友；见过面，但不熟悉；从没见过面，但有 email 等网上联系；不认识，没有任何网上联系。

23. 您是否阅读安替在报刊杂志上发表的文章？经常，偶尔，从来没有。
24. 您能否谈谈安替博客最吸引你的地方是什么？
25. 您最不喜欢安替博客的什么方面？

性别：男 女

年龄：18 周岁以上，19—24 周岁，25—34 周岁，35—44 周岁，45—54 周岁，55—64 周岁，65 周岁以上

教育：小学，初中，高中，大专，本科，硕士，博士

职业：学生，教育业，传媒业，法律，政府机关，金融/企业管理人员，服务业，劳动工人，退休人士，待业/失业，家庭照料者，其他。



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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The criteria for rational-critical debate are: reasoned and reflexive exchange and critique of moral-practical validity claims, discursive inclusion and equality, respectful listening, sincerity regarding one's motives and interests as relevant to the discourse, and autonomy from administrative and economic power.

<sup>2</sup> Weblog-tracking company Technorati, Inc., reports almost 4.2 million Weblogs worldwide as of October 2004, up from about one million a year earlier (Rosenbloom, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> According to *The Research Report on the Development and Future of Chinese Blogs, 2005-2006*, there were 2,000,000 blogs in 2004, and the number increased to 16,000,000 by the end of 2005. <http://www.chinalabs.com/idea/20060118/index.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> See *Statistic Reports on the Internet Development in China*, 17<sup>th</sup> survey, January 2006, published by CNNIC (China Internet Network Information Center).

<sup>5</sup> See *Statistic Reports on the Internet Development in China*, 16<sup>th</sup> survey, July 2005, published by CNNIC (China Internet Network Information Center).

<sup>6</sup> See *Statistic Reports on the Internet Development in China*, 17<sup>th</sup> survey, Jan 2006, published by CNNIC (China Internet Network Information Center).

<sup>7</sup> See *The Research Report on the Development and Future of Chinese Blogs, 2005-2006*, Internet Lab, Jan. 2006. <http://www.chinalabs.com/idea/20060118/index.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Sullivan writes for [www.andrewsullivan.com](http://www.andrewsullivan.com), The New Republic, and The New York Times.

<sup>9</sup> It is the 13<sup>th</sup> question of the survey. See the Appendix.

<sup>10</sup> From the Anti Interview transcript. 2005-3-7, Beijing.

<sup>11</sup> Posted 2004-12-31 by laz at <http://anti.blog-city.com/978864.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> Two open ended questions were designed in the survey. They asked the reasons why or why not the readers like Anti blog.

<sup>13</sup> From the Anti Interview transcript. 2005-3-7, Beijing.

<sup>14</sup> For example, 'The blog has finally been blocked. I swear to search for any one who has participated in this act.' [http://anti.blog-city.com/\\_1.htm](http://anti.blog-city.com/_1.htm), 2005-08-17.

<sup>15</sup> Posted 2005-10-17, 'Seeing and believing in China: The readers' editor on mistakes made by a reporter under pressure', translated by Anti from The Guardian. This article was followed by another post 'I would die or I should die': from a translation mistake to the difference between the domestic and the foreign expectations on individual responsibility.', by Anti, 2005-10-18.

<sup>16</sup> Posted 2005-12-13 by Anti, in Anti MSN Spaces, 'Clear belief and high-quality democracy'.

<sup>17</sup> BBC Chinese News website quoted Anti's claiming that everybody who don't want to be cheated should retreat their annual subscription of Xinjingbao because it is no longer the one that people used to read. It will be deteriorated.

<sup>18</sup> Yahoo gave out the email information of Shitao to the Chinese government. Shitao was accused of providing national confidential information to foreign countries and was imprisoned

<sup>19</sup> Posted 2005-11-23 by Anti MSN Spaces.

<sup>20</sup> Posted 2005-08-24 by Anti, in Anti MSN Spaces.

<sup>21</sup> Posted 2005-08-17 by Anti, traced at [http://anti.blog-city.com/\\_1.htm](http://anti.blog-city.com/_1.htm).

<sup>22</sup> On the first post of the new blog in MSN Spaces, commenters have already warned Anti about the risk and Anti himself knows that his act might influence MSN users again just as what happened to blog-city. See 2005-08-17 post and comment.

<sup>23</sup> See Rconversation, 2006-01-03, *Microsoft takes down Chinese blog*, [http://rconversation.blogs.com/rconversation/2006/01/microsoft\\_takes.html](http://rconversation.blogs.com/rconversation/2006/01/microsoft_takes.html).

<sup>24</sup> Posted by Anti in Anti Space, 2005-12-15.

<sup>25</sup> Posted by Anti at Anti Blog-city, 2005-05-10, <http://anti.blog-city.com/1262104.htm>

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- <sup>26</sup> Posted by Anti at Anti Space, 2005-09-22.  
<sup>27</sup> Posted by Anti at Anti Space, 2005-09-25.  
<sup>28</sup> Posted by Anti at Anti Space, 2005-08-18.  
<sup>29</sup> Posted by Anti at Anti Space, 2005-11-02.  
<sup>30</sup> Posted by Anti at Anti Space, 2005-10-12.  
<sup>31</sup> Posted by Anti at Anti Space: 2005-12-30.





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